



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 23.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 13, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

IN THE TRENCHES; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE SURROUNDED.

By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.



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CHAPTER I.

AN IMPORTANT EXPEDITION.

The attack of the Confederate Army, under Generals Price and Van Dorn, upon the Union position at Corinth, Miss., in October, 1862, the second year of the great Civil War, had proved a failure. The strategy of Grant had proved too much for them.

Repulsed, the Confederates had fallen back, and had General Rosecrans pressed in pursuit, as General Grant had ordered, it was believed that the commands of Price and Van Dorn might have been destroyed.

But for some reason the pursuit was abandoned, hence, the Confederates were able later to rally and at a safe distance to hold their ground and prepare to strike another blow.

Prominent in all the fighting about Corinth was a little company of New York boys, known as the Fairdale Blues.

They had organized in Fairdale, N. Y., and had been mustered in at Washington. Their captain, Jack Clark, a handsome and fearless youth, was the son of a prominent merchant of that town.

Homer Clark, Jack's father, was the personal friend of President Lincoln, and when the Blues marched through

Washington, the young captain and his boys were under the eager and interested gaze of Lincoln.

"You have a fine company there," he said afterward to Jack. "I know that you will distinguish yourselves."

And the President's prophecy came true. The Blues covered themselves with glory at Bull Run, and in many of the battles of the Peninsula campaign they won distinction.

But, during the long period of inactivity of the Army of the Potomac, they were transferred to the West and soon found themselves at Donelson, under Grant.

Here they won distinction, and since then had been under Grant's especial orders.

There was a short respite after the disastrous attack on Corinth. The Confederate leaders, somewhat discouraged, had drawn off their forces and were reorganizing for a new move.

Despite this, not a day passed without a collision of some sort between detachments of both armies in some part of the region. With an incident of this sort our story will deal.

The Blues were in camp at Corinth. Jack Clark had occupied himself with recruiting their thinned ranks and in perfecting their drill. The Blues had the name of being the best drilled company in the Union camp.

Hal Martin, the first lieutenant of the Blues, had just entered the young captain's tent. His face wore an expression of much pleasure and eager anticipation.

"Good news, Jack!" he cried.

"Eh!" exclaimed the boy-captain. "What is it, Hal?"

"I hear that we are going to leave Corinth and embark upon a new campaign. We are to march upon Vicksburg."

"Vicksburg!" Jack's face grew bright. "That is the greatest stronghold of the Confederacy. It is deemed impregnable by the Confederates."

"All right! You'll see how General Grant will capture it."

"That is good news, Hal. Anything is better than lying around here in idleness. I shall be glad——"

He did not finish the sentence. A figure had appeared in the tent entrance. Both young officers sprang to their feet.

They saw a man of medium height, dressed in plain general's uniform. His appearance was plain and his manner unassuming. But the square, bearded jaw, the deep-set stern eyes, showed force and character.

"General Grant!" exclaimed both Jack and Hal.

"Keep your seats, gentlemen," said the great general as he nonchalantly puffed at his cigar.

"Not until you are also seated, general," said Jack, as he placed a chair for his visitor. "We are deeply honored by this visit to our humble quarters."

The general smiled grimly.

"You may think them luxurious quarters before many weeks," he said. "I have to warn you that the hardest campaign you have yet known is before you."

"We have an inkling of that," replied Jack. "Is it to be Vicksburg?"

"Vicksburg!"

General Grant repeated the name in a clear, decisive tone. His eyes seemed to acquire a determined glare. He seated himself while the two young officers remained standing, as was proper in the presence of their superior.

But General Grant, with a careless wave of the hand, said in a tone that did not brook disobedience: "Sit down!"

At once the boys sank into their chairs. There was a moment of silence, during which General Grant seemed to be lost in deep reflection.

Finally, however, he removed his cigar from his mouth and said:

"Clark, are your men in good condition?"

"The very best, general," replied Jack.

"Good! I have work for them."

"We are more than glad to know that."

General Grant's brows knit. He turned slightly in his chair.

"You may wonder why I came here, instead of sending for you to come to my tent," he said; "but I have a reason for it. In some inexplicable way my plans of late leak out and get into the hands of the enemy. There are cunning spies in our midst and it is hard to beat them."

"But, I can talk with you here and no listening ears are about. I will tell you now what I want you to do."

General Grant laid a small map on the table. He placed his finger on it and said:

"If you will observe, this is a map of the region between Holly Springs and Oxford. A large force of the enemy has concentrated at Oxford. I shall move along that road when I advance upon Vicksburg. I have sent word to Washburn to march east from Helena, Ark., to the Tallahatchie. At this moment I know that the Confederate general, Pemberton, is located on that river with a large force to prevent our moving south, along the Central Mississippi Railroad. Now the Confederate line is between Oxford and Grenada. General Washburn will come up in Pemberton's rear and I shall engage him in front. This will leave a clear field open for Sherman to march down to Vicksburg. Is this clear to you?"

Both Jack and his young lieutenant had listened with the deepest interest.

To them it was a gigantic series of plans which were sure to involve great battles and desperate all-round work. They were awed for a moment by the magnitude of the project.

"That is not all," continued General Grant. "I shall abandon Corinth and seize Holly Springs, making of it a hospital depot and supply station. Then I shall advance upon Oxford and with Washburn's assistance, beat Pemberton. The rest will be easy."

"I see," said Jack quietly. "It is a grand project. I hope it will not fail."

"Fail!" exclaimed Grant sharply, "that is not the word for you to use, young man."

Jack turned scarlet and stammered:

"I don't see how it can fail."

"That is better. It must not fail. We gave the Confederates a shock at Shiloh. They thought they could drive us into the river at Pittsburg Landing. But they did not do it. Neither did they drive us out of Corinth. It is now our turn to do some driving."

"General Grant," said Jack with inspiration, "I can see the logic of your plans and I know they will succeed. To be a party to their success is my ambition. Tell me what I can do to aid you, and I am heart and soul at your service."

"Well spoken," said the great Union general. "I believe in your sincerity, Clark, and that is why I have come to you. I want your assistance in this respect. Just beyond Holly Springs is the highway to Oxford. Now I have reliable information that Van Dorn, with several thousand cavalry, is moving that way. I want you and your company to march down that road, burn all the bridges and raise every obstacle you can to his progress. You need not engage him for he has too heavy a force. But fall back as he advances, and devastate the country as you go, to hinder his progress. Do you see?"

"I understand," said Jack.

"Good! Now I will explain to you why I wish you to do this. I have a counter-move to attack him in flank when the right moment comes. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Can you start at once?"

"Within the hour," said Jack. "These are all the orders you have for us, general?"

"Yes. Make as good as stand as you can in the face of such a superior force. Then, if he retreats, return to Corinth and report to me."

"All right, sir."

General Grant arose and saluted. As he left the tent he said:

"You must keep this matter secret. Let no one know what your enterprise is to be. Keep it dark."

Jack saluted and the general took his leave. When he had gone the two young officers faced each other.

"Well," said Hal with a deep breath, "we could not ask for anything better than that, Jack?"

"I should say not. It looks as if we would get our fill of fighting before we return."

"We certainly will. The boys will be delighted with the project."

"Indeed, they will."

It is hardly necessary to say that the two young officers lost no time in preparing for the great expedition. When the roll was called and the boys fell into line they knew that something out of the ordinary was on the list, and their spirits were high in anticipation.

In an incredibly short space of time the Blues were in marching order.

They marched out of Corinth with quick and jaunty step and soon were on the road. They were to experience many thrilling adventures before they would again see Corinth.

Jack, mounted on a fine horse, rode at their head. Through the country they marched mile after mile until the noon hour came, and they halted for a rest under some spreading oaks by a stream of water.

The boys quickly threw themselves upon the ground and partook of their rations. But Jack Clark galloped to a little eminence near and began to scan the country with his glass. He was given a sudden start of surprise.

CHAPTER II.

OPEECHUCK, THE NATCHEZ.

As Jack Clark sat on his horse, carefully scrutinizing the country, he saw an object which had emerged from a tract of swamp just below him which claimed his attention.

At first he was unable to determine whether it was a man or an animal. But presently, as the object came more into the open, he saw it was the former.

Jack watched the distant unknown with interest. Not that there was anything unusual in the presence of a man in that locality.

But the distant figure was not that of a negro, nor yet a white man. He was unquestionably an Indian.

The appearance of a red man in that locality was a matter of some mystery to the boy-captain.

He knew that there were remnants of the Natchez and the Cherokee nations enlisted in the scout service of the Southern Army. In the western part of Missouri some tribes had been tempted to dig up the hatchet.

But he knew of few red men in the northern service. So it may be understood that Jack was deeply interested.

The red man was coming up the rise of ground from the swamp. He wore only a simple feather in his raven-black hair and none of the panoply of war usually affected by his race.

From this Jack was partly led to the assumption that his mission might be one of peace. He was plainly advancing straight for the eminence, upon which was the boy-captain.

At the base of this eminence he came to a halt and held up both his hands in token of amity.

Jack answered with a like signal. The red man, without hesitation, now began to climb the ascent.

Jack waited until he had reached the top and was face to face with him. Then the savage stood with folded arms and stoical visage before him.

For a moment Jack gazed at him with interest. He thought he had never seen a more symmetrical figure than that of this Indian. He was a perfect bronze statue.

"Well, my friend," said Jack after a moment, "what can I do for you?"

The Indian's face never changed in its expression. He swept one arm to the west and said:

"Yankee, no go there. Heap enemy! Kill quick! White man kill!"

The young captain gave a start. The Indian's words carried a conviction of truth. He looked at him keenly.

"Who is over there, my friend?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

"Him you call rebel! Him wear gray! You wear blue! Opeechuck know!"

"That's right, Opeechuck," said Jack readily. "But how do I know that you are telling the truth? Most of your people are allied with the white men in gray."

But the Indian shook his head.

"Me no friend," he said. "Try to make Opeechuck slave. Tie up in woods. Give heap blows. See?"

He bared his back and Jack gave a start. He saw great scars across the flesh, indicating a terrible castigation at some former time with a cat-o'-nine-tails. The Indian's eyes burned with a terrible light of vengeance.

He could understand at once why Opeechuck was friendly to the soldiers in blue. His heart went out to him at once in sympathy.

"That is too bad, Opeechuck," he said. "It was a villainous thing to do. I don't blame you for feeling as you do toward the Confederates. I feel that I can trust you. Give me your hand."

Jack had dismounted and now extended his hand to the Indian. Opeechuck grasped it and then stepped back with a guttural exclamation:

"Yankee take other trail," he said. "Come with me."

"Oh, but we have orders to keep on this road, Opee-

chuck," said Jack. "Are you sure the enemy is too strong for us?"

The Indian nodded vigorously.

"Like leaves on trees," he said. "They have big chief. Him they call Forrest."

Jack gave a thrilled start.

"Forrest!" he exclaimed. "Is that true, Opeechuck?"

The Indian nodded.

"Yes, all true."

The boy-captain began now to realize the full gravity of the situation. He knew that Forrest, the noted cavalry leader and guerrilla, was a powerful and dangerous foe.

There was none to be more feared. In all the Southern Army Forrest had no rival as a strategist and a fighter.

At once Jack knew that it would be folly to disregard the Indian's warning. Just then, far to the west, where trees crowned a ridge, he caught the gleam of steel in the sunlight.

And, placing his glass to his eyes, he saw plainly a troop of horses. At that distance color was hardly to be defined, but Jack made no doubt it was gray.

At once he turned to Opeechuck and said:

"Opeechuck, can I depend upon you? Will you act as guide and scout for us?"

A gleam of pleasure showed for an instant in the Indian's eyes. Then he made reply:

"Me be scout. Me help you. Me show you way through swamp. Forrest never find you."

"I will repay you well, Opeechuck. Now let us go down."

The Indian followed the boy-captain down to the scene of the little bivouac below. The boys stared at Opeechuck, but when they knew that he had brought them an opportune warning of the proximity of Forrest they gathered about and cheered him.

The Indian, however, was non-committal, and stoical after his kind. He accepted rations tendered him by Jack.

Then, when the bivouac was broken and the boys fell in again for the march, he arose like a lithe hound and took the lead, walking on at a long loping pace, which the Blues did well to keep up with.

Opeechuck deviated from the road now, and crossing the fields, skirted the swamp. He led the way tirelessly across the rough country.

For full two hours the Blues kept on thus, climbing over obstructions, wading small streams and passing through patches of woods.

Then suddenly they came to a spot where two ravines united and made a long and deep valley. Here were many boulders making a huge ledge and precipices. Opeechuck came to a halt and said:

"Hide here! Keep behind rocks! Pretty quick see something!"

The Blues sank down behind the boulders. Suddenly a startling sound went pealing through the ravine. Every boy clutched his musket.

It was the note of a bugle. Then down into the ravine surged a long column of mounted men in gray. They were within easy musket shot.

It was Forrest's band of raiders. They were several thousand in number.

The Blues, with strange emotions, watched them. Watched in security, for they were in a perfectly safe position. They could see and not be seen.

"Pretty soon pass," said Opeechuck. "Then we march on."

For an interminable period the gray troop filed by. It seemed an age before the last horseman in gray disappeared down the valley.

Then Opeechuck arose. The shadows of night were beginning to fall fast. The Indian turned to Jack:

"All safe here! Make camp?" he asked. "To-morrow, march on!"

Jack hesitated a moment. It was really his desire to reach the Holly Springs and Oxford highway before dark. But he finally decided to accept Opeechuck's advice.

So the Blues proceeded to camp on the spot. In a few moments they had camp-fires burning, there being plenty of fuel in the woods near.

Jack was careful to post a good, strong picket guard. Then, after this was accomplished, he went back to the camp and joined Hal Martin.

The young lieutenant had just finished toasting some smoked meat over the coals of his fire, and as Jack appeared on the scene he sprang up.

"Hello, captain!" he cried. "I was just about to go in search of you. I have an important matter to present to you!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Jack. "What do you mean?"

"Here! read this!"

Hal extended a dainty bit of note-paper to Jack. The young captain gave a start as he saw delicate feminine handwriting upon it.

He read what was to him a most startling communication:

"To the captain of the Union soldiers: The writer of this is a Northern young woman, living at the present moment at Fairview Plantation. She is compelled to remain in the South, among those whose sentiments are hostile to the North. But she is true to her own people and wishing to prove her loyalty she sends warning that the presence of the Fairdale Blues in this region is known to General Van Dorn, who has sent a detachment from Oxford to surround and capture you and your company. Be, therefore, on your guard. Do not march by the upper road to Holly Springs. I send this by a faithful negro servant. Yours for the cause,

SYBIL ST. CLAIR."

Jack for a moment was silent after reading this startling epistle. It was a revelation to him and he could not help but feel extremely grateful to the fair writer.

So Van Dorn had already learned of his presence in the region. This was, of course, what was to be expected as a matter of course.

Jack now remembered the tactics he had been ordered to adopt.

This was to draw Van Dorn on, and retiring before him,

throw every possible hindrance in his path. Bridges must be burned and the country devastated so as to impede his march.

The letter from Sybil St. Clair hinted at the possibility of being surrounded. But Jack only smiled at this, though in truth he realized that it was a matter of much menace that Forrest was now in his rear.

The boy-captain hesitated a moment and then said:

"This is important, Hal. Where is the negro who brought it?"

"I have held him, thinking perhaps you might want to send an answer."

"A wise move on your part. Let him be brought hither."

Hal leaped up and whistled to a guard of soldiers a little distance away in the gloom.

They came up quickly. Between them was an aged negro. He stood before Jack a moment later. The young captain proceeded to question him.

CHAPTER III.

THE NORTHERN GIRL.

"Did you bring this message, Pompey?" asked Jack as he held up the dainty missive.

"I did, sah," replied the negro, "but mah name ain't Pompey. Ise jes' plain Jim, sah."

"All right, Jim," said Jack with a smile. "Did you bring this letter?"

"I done did, sah."

"Who gave it to you?"

"Mah young missus, ober at Fairview."

"Where is Fairview?"

The coon looked surprised.

"Yo' don' know whar Fairview is?"

"I must say, I do not. You must remember that I am a stranger here, Jim."

The negro looked sharply at Jack a moment and then pointed over the ridge beyond the ravine.

"Marse Osborn Howe's plantation am ober dere, sah, about two miles. Yo' done march by it, sah, but yo' didn't see it, sah, bekase de hill was in de way. Missy Sybil, sah, she am de niece of Marse Howe, an' she am a Northern lady, sah. Ole Marse Howe he am a Confederate an' he jes' keeps Missy Sybil locked up in de house all de time fo' fear she send some wo'd to de Union troops about de Confederate plans. Fo' ole Marse Howe he am gret friens wif de big Confederate general. He am de gret friend ob General Forrest, sah, an' Miss Sybil she jes' cry all de time an' want to go to de war as a nurse. But ole Marse Howe he won't let her go. So she jes' send me ober to gib yo' dat lily note. If yo' hab any wo'd yo' wants to send back to her Ise done ready to take it back."

Jack listened with interest to the old negro's story. His eyes flashed and his veins tingled as old Jim described the young girl's desire to escape and join the profession of army nurses.

"Then your mistress and her uncle don't get along very well, Jim?" he asked.

Old Jim shook his head.

"Dey doan' git along at all, sah," he replied. "Missy Sybil, she am in lub wif a young Northern lieutenant, but Marse Howe he wants her to marry some one else. I done fink she run away if she eber gits de chance."

"What? You don't mean to say that she is not free to leave the plantation?"

"Dat am a fac', sah."

"She is then a prisoner there?"

"She am all ob dat, sah."

Jack's veins tingled. He whistled softly. Then he said:

"You say it is two miles to the plantation, do you, Jim?"

"Yes, sah."

Jack turned to Hal. The young lieutenant had also been an interested listener to old Jim's tale.

"I say, Hal, it's too bad. Something ought to be done for this young woman. She is in a bad position."

"That's right," agreed Hal. "Suppose we march over there and make the old fellow set her free?"

"Oh, that won't do! We would get into a mix-up, right away. We might be surrounded by Forrest, or even by Van Dorn, and you may be sure both of those slippery rascals are not far away."

"What do you propose then?"

"Strategy!"

"Be more explicit."

"I will," said Jack. "In the first place, if the Natchez, Opeechuck, is to be believed, we are safe here at present."

"Yes."

"Now my plan is this: We will discard our uniforms and dress as plain citizens. I have my citizen's clothes in my baggage and doubtless you have yours. We will accompany old Jim to Fairview Plantation. We will call on Osborn Howe, the proprietor, as spies or secret agents of the Confederacy. If we play our part well, we can fool him, get the girl her freedom and perhaps in the meantime worm some important secrets out of the old planter."

Hal's eyes danced.

"Gee, whizz! that is risky business," he said. "What if we get caught?"

"I don't see any chance, if we are clever. Do you remember that spy, Hopkins, whom Grant hanged the other day at Corinth?"

"Yes."

"Well, he had on his person, papers and credentials signed by General Bragg. I have those same credentials. We can use them to gain the planter's confidence."

Hal, staggered by the daring of this plan, was for a moment silent. Then he said:

"But how will it be if Howe happens to have known Hopkins?"

"The chance is very slight."

"That settles it. I'll go you, Jack. We will leave the company with the second lieutenant, Walter Gray."

"Yes. I will see Walter at once. Go and change your uniform, Hal. I will make all other arrangements."

The coon, old Jim, was much pleased with the plan and

chuckled deeply over it. He saw a chance for the rescue of his young mistress.

It was not long before both Jack and Hal appeared in citizen's dress. They wore hats of the Southern type to further their disguise.

Jack had placed the spy's papers and credentials in his pocket and was ready for his part of Joe Hopkins, the Confederate spy.

The Blues, left in charge of Walter Gray, the second lieutenant, were to remain in bivouac until the return of the two young officers.

Opeechuck, the Indian, sat by the camp-fire, stoical and apparently buried in his own reflections.

Jack and Hal left the camp, under the guidance of old Jim. In the darkness they climbed the ridge and started off southward.

When they reached the high land a distant sight caused Jack to come to a halt. Hal did the same.

The young officers saw a distant fiery glow against the sky. They knew it rose from the fire of some encampment.

"It am Forrest," explained old Jim. "He am camped ober on Briar Creek."

"Oh!" said Jack. "Any danger of running into him at the plantation?"

But the coon shook his head.

"Ah don' fink so," he said. "Ob co'se he sometimes come dar. But Ah don' fink he come to-night."

They kept on now, down into the lower land. It was not long before they came out into a road.

"Dis am de road to Grenada," said old Jim. "Berry quick, now, yo' see de lights ob de ole plantation."

"Remember," said Jack, "I am Joe Hopkins, the spy, and you, Hal, are Larry Smith, my confrere."

"All right!" agreed Hal.

In a few moments they saw the distant gleam of light. Old Jim explained that they were the lights of the plantation.

As they drew nearer they could see dimly the outlines of the great plantation house. There were lights upon the broad porch. At this point old Jim came to a halt.

"Dis am all I kin do," he said. "If I goes any nearer I done suah to be seen, an' ole marse he kill dis chile if he fink Ise prowlin' round dis way at night."

"All right, Jim," said Jack. "We can do the rest ourselves. We'll excuse you."

The old negro slipped away in the gloom. Jack now whispered to Hal:

"We're in for it, Hal. Do you see anybody on that porch?"

"Yes."

"It looks like two men."

"So it is."

For a moment the two boys ruminated upon the best move to make. They had thought of putting on a bold front and walking into the house and demanding hospitality of the planter, as Confederate spies and scouts.

But, now, as they saw those two men sitting on the porch, curiosity impelled Jack to change his plan of action a little.

"Wait a moment, Hal," he whispered. "I believe I will creep up there in the shadows by the corner of the house and see if I can hear what those two men are talking about."

"A good plan."

So the two young Union officers crept up to the corner of the house. They could now distinguish the two men, even their features.

One was a tall, slender man of the Southern type, but with a cast of features decidedly repellant. His jaw was protruding and his mouth had a cruel expression. His brow was overhanging and his eyes deep set.

That he was the planter, Osborn Howe, Jack soon learned.

His companion was a young man, dressed in the planter style. He was a coarse and vulgar type of man, with bloated features and keen, calculating eyes.

"I tell you, Luke Lamont," the planter said, "it don't do to let any living woman browbeat ye. If they once do it, they'll think they always can. The best way to get along with 'em is first to break their spirit."

"Humph!" retorted the other. "You have had charge of your niece for two years now and I don't see that you have much control over her."

"Oh, you don't, eh?" sneered the planter. "Well, you'll see. I've told her that she'll marry you and nobody else. She'll do it."

"She says she won't."

"She says so. Well, you young fool, did you ever know a woman to say yes right out and out? They are always on the negative side. You've got to be firm and decisive with them."

"I tried that and failed."

"Failed?"

"Yes."

"What did you say to her?"

"I told her that I'd marry her in spite of the Old Nick. She retorted that the Old Nick should have her before she'd marry me."

At this the planter laughed.

"Well, well!" he cried. "You are certainly a brilliant lover. I suppose you wilted then. If there wasn't so much at stake I'd tell you, you couldn't have her, anyway."

"Well, if you're going to turn against me I might as well quit," said Lamont sulkily. "I am not such a bad match that I need to go begging. There is Miss Filkins, over to Ripley, will marry me for the asking. I don't want an unwilling wife."

"You're a fool, Lamont! A fool, I say!" cried Howe. "Don't you know women at all? Why, the very moment that they say no, they mean yes, all the time. Now I want you to go to her and make love in the proper way."

"Well, I'll try it. But——"

"Sh! by Jupiter! She is coming now. We will settle the question."

The master of Fairview had sprung from his chair. From the house a slender figure had emerged and stood on the porch.

In the dim light Jack Clark saw that she was beautiful. He experienced a thrill as he noted the wonderful contour of her figure and the rare loveliness of her face.

"Great guns!" whispered Hal. "She is the prettiest girl I ever saw, Jack. I am half in love with her, myself."

"I am here, uncle," said Sybil St. Clair in a clear, sweet voice. "Did you not send for me?"

"I did, my niece," replied the planter as he rose. "And it is upon a matter of the utmost importance."

CHAPTER IV.

PLANTATION HOSPITALITY.

Sybil noted Lamont beside her uncle and her face paled a little. But she said in a calm tone:

"I hope you do not require the impossible of me, uncle?"

"I do not, Sybil," he said. "What I have to say to you is of the utmost importance. You must know your true condition. You were a homeless, moneyless orphan two years ago. It is my money that is making of you what you are. I hope you realize some little sense of appreciation."

"I do, from the greatest depth of my heart," replied Sybil with a flushed face. "I also know that I would give half my life to have the money to repay you in full. The obligation seems more than I can bear."

"Tut, tut! No insolence, girl!" snapped the planter. "I'll devise some way to teach you respect for your benefactor."

The girl was silent. The planter glared at her. Then he turned and laid a hand on Lamont's shoulder.

"It is my wish that you accept the love and esteem of this worthy young man, Sybil. He has wealth and he can give you a good home. Better far than that frivolous young lieutenant, Harold May. Now come forward and take Luke's hand."

The young girl stood like a statue, very pale and rigid. She did not comply with the request.

For a moment Howe glared at her. Then he gritted in an ominous voice:

"Are ye going to obey?"

"No!"

She spoke in a clear, firm tone. There was nothing of defiance in her reply, but there was everything of resolution. The planter allowed a hiss to escape his lips.

"Then ye defy me?" he demanded.

"I do not, uncle," said the young girl quietly. "But I cannot obey you. I do not care for Mr. Lamont and I cannot marry him."

"Sybil," said Lamont, "I'm a prosperous man. I love you and can make you happy. I will give you a good home."

"If you had the wealth and position of a king I would not marry you, for I do not love you."

For a moment Lamont seemed angry and taken aback.

"I don't see what you can have against me, Sybil," he said. "I kin give you a good home. Just say the word."

"I have given you my answer."

"I see. You are stuck on that young lieutenant, Harold May. Well, I can tell you that he is not true to you. He has another girl over in Corinth——"

"That is a lie!"

She spoke forcibly, and her slender figure straightened. Lamont started back and now Howe, with an imprecation, started up:

"You ungrateful hussy," he gritted. "Do you realize what you owe me? Is this the way you repay me? I say you shall marry this young man, or by the Justice, I'll know the reason why."

"I have given you the reason why," said Sybil firmly. "I do not love him and I will not marry him."

With this she started to re-enter the house. But Howe sprang forward like a panther and grasped her wrist.

"I'll break your spirit!" he hissed. "I'll see if you will defy me."

Jack Clark could stand no more. In an instant he was on the porch and had caught Howe by the shoulders. He hurled him across the porch.

"You hound!" cried the young Union officer. "How dare you lay hands on a helpless woman!"

Howe scrambled to his feet, hissing and foaming like a maniac. He glared at the boy-captain and his anger was mingled with sheer surprise. Lamont seemed too surprised to speak or act.

"Fiends and furies!" gasped the planter. "Who are you?"

"I am a man," replied Jack, shrewdly remembering his position and making use of the Southern twang of speech. "If I warn't I'd let you go ahead an' abuse this pooty gal."

"Get off my premises. You've no right meddling in my affairs."

"Haven't I?" retorted Jack with sang froid. "Don't ye be too sure. Shall I tell you who I am? I'm Joe Hopkins, the spy, an' here's my pard, Larry Smith. We're just from Van Dorn's camp and we can tell you that Sherman and his men are apt to be down here in six hours' time and they won't leave a bone or a biscuit on yer plantation."

The planter gave a gasp. To him this was news of the most appalling sort. It displaced all other matters, even that of the marriage of his niece against her will.

"Great Joppa!" he exclaimed. "Is that the truth? You're not lying to us? Let me see your credentials."

"Yes," said Lamont. "Let's see your credentials. He looks to me like a Yankee spy, Howe."

"Do I look like a Yank?" exclaimed Jack as he threw open his jacket. "So do you look like a crawfish."

His air of bluster and bravado did more to establish the confidence of the two Southerners than aught else. But Jack knew that he had the captured credentials of the real spy, Hopkins, and felt safe.

Sybil St. Clair stood by the open door and for a moment there was an eager, hopeful light in her eyes. But she now remained no longer on the porch, but slipped into the house.

"I've heard of Joe Hopkins, the spy," said Lamont. "If you are Joe Hopkins, we're glad to see you."

"But that don't give him the right to meddle with my efforts to discipline my niece!" growled Howe.

"Oh, see here, friend," said Jack, slapping the planter on the back. "You don't take a joke worth a cent. What do you 'uns suppose I keer about your pooty niece? Settle yer accounts with her in the morning. Just now I want a little of your time."

"Well, I'll accept your apology," growled Howe, "but where did you come from and what's brought you here?"

"I am from Van Dorn I told you and I'm going down to Grenada to carry the news of the advance of Sherman. His men are close behind and they'll like be here by morning. I'd advise you to get out before that time. There's a heap of stories around that he's hangin' men like you, that are helpin' the Confederate Army on the sly."

"There ain't any sly work about it!" cried Howe. "I don't conceal it!"

"Just so. Then your position is a dangerous one."

The planter removed his hat. There were beads of cold sweat on his forehead.

"Hang these confounded Yankees!" he cried. "What did Beauregard let 'em get into Mississippi for? Can't our boys drive 'em back?"

"We haven't been able to yet," replied Jack. "It looks as if they would come right down through to Vicksburg."

"Vicksburg!" cried Lamont, contemptuously. "I hope they don't expect to take Vicksburg."

"I think they do."

At this both Southerners laughed scornfully.

"Well!" cried Howe, "they'll get a nice little surprise party down there, you bet. Why, the whole armies of the earth can't take Vicksburg. It's absolutely impregnable."

"I hope so," said Jack, unctuously.

"But that's enough," cried Howe. "You're welcome to Fairview, Hopkins. Come in and have something to eat and drink."

"Ah!" cried Jack, "that hits us about right, don't it, Larry?"

"I should say it did," agreed Hal. "We are not so foolish as to decline the offer."

Howe and Lamont led the way into the mansion. They entered the well-appointed dining hall. Howe made a gesture to a negro attendant who disappeared, only to return with a hamper of wine bottles.

This was followed by a cold roast fowl, some cakes and bread, and a relish. In a few moments a most appetizing spread was placed on the table.

Howe motioned his guests to chairs and then sat down himself. As they ate he kept up a running fire of questions concerning the movements of Van Dorn.

"I think if Van knew of my perilous position he'd send heavy detachments over here to divert the enemy's advance," he said. "If my plantation is raided, hang me, but I'll have old Sherman's hide for it."

"I don't believe it," said Jack.

"Ye don't, eh?"

"No, I don't. If ever there was a shrewd fox, it's Sherman. You can bet Grant ain't half so sharp."

Lamont had been imbibing freely of the wine. This he had alternated with a little French brandy and the mixture had staggered him. He was dull and stupid.

The liquor made Howe garrulous and boastful. He began to brag about the power of the Confederacy and the bravery of its army and his own resources.

"I'll sacrifice everything," he cried, "all the money I've got to see the South get her rights. I'm a loyal citizen."

The two boys had only pretended to drink. Matters were working just to their satisfaction. It was their purpose to, if possible, seize the opportunity to reveal themselves to Sybil and offer her their services.

No opportunity had as yet offered. But presently Jack arose.

"My dear Howe," he said flatteringly, "I have no words with which to express my gratitude to ye for this hospitality. You're a true Southern gentleman. Here's to yer long life and good health."

Jack raised a glass of water. Howe was too drunk to notice that it was not wine. He staggered to his feet as did Lamont.

"Thank ye!" he cried. "We'll drink another to the Confederacy."

Then he staggered out of the room, and across the broad colonial hall into the handsomely furnished drawing-room. He cast himself into a chair. Lamont did the same.

Jack followed and engrossed the attention of both by a series of funny anecdotes. But while he was doing this Hal Martin remained behind in the hall.

The young lieutenant knew all depended on meeting Sybil and revealing himself to her.

As good luck had it, just at that moment she came down the broad stairs. In an instant Hal started to meet her. But he was given a start of surprise.

She had a finger on her lip.

"I understand," she said in a low tone. "Old Jim has told me all. It is indeed kind of you to come to my succor. I am anxious to leave here at once."

"We will take you away with us if you desire," said Hal.

"I shall be glad to avail myself of the opportunity. You heard enough to understand my uncle's purpose."

"We did."

"If I leave here it must be secretly."

"We shall very soon take our departure. If you will meet us at the outer gate we will take you back to our camp and then find a way to send you north."

"You are very kind," she replied in a whisper. "I will take my Mammy Lou with me. She will go anywhere with me. Oh, I cannot thank you enough."

"There is no obligation, Miss St. Clair. It is an honor to do you the service," replied Hal with a low bow.

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS.

Sybil flitted back up the stairs while Hal went into the drawing-room. Lamont had managed to light a cheroot and was trying to smoke.

Howe was laughing immoderately at Jack's humorous stories. Hal gave Jack a significant glance, and the boy-captain turned and said:

"Well, friend Howe, I reckon I must leave ye. I'd like to remain under your roof longer, but I'm wanted down to Grenada."

"Just tell Van Dorn the fix I'm in and he'll send me a brigade to defend Fairview," said Howe tipsily. "I hope ye'll come again, Hopkins."

"Thank you. As it happens——"

Jack never finished the sentence. A very startling thing happened. The footman appeared in the doorway.

Into the room from behind him walked a man dressed in Confederate uniform. He wore the shoulder-straps of a general.

He was in cavalry uniform. His boots were mud-stained and the rowels of his spurs tinged with blood. He stood a moment and looked about the room in a searching manner.

Howe bounded from his chair as if shot. His tipsiness vanished on the instant.

"Great molly horns!" he gasped. "Are you back again, Forrest? Bless my soul. I thought you were at Memphis."

"Memphis!" repeated the great Confederate general, "that is the stronghold of the Union Army. What could I do there?"

"Well, I dunno," spluttered the planter. "I only heard that ye was there."

"Well, you heard wrong. I am at this moment in camp on Briar Creek, not three miles from here."

Jack Clark and his young lieutenant, Hal Martin, were for a moment aghast at the situation. They were face to face with the sharpest general in the Confederacy.

Forrest now turned and gazed at them in an inquiring way.

"What is new, Howe?" he asked. "Have you any report of Sherman's advance?"

"Yes," replied the planter. "I make ye acquainted with Joe Hopkins, the spy, and his mate, Larry Smith. They can tell ye all about the Union advance."

Forrest turned and seemed to look the two young Union officers through and through. His gaze was a cold and a keen one.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "you have the advantage of me. I thought I knew every spy or secret-service man in this army. But I have never met you before."

It was Jack Clark who made the mistake.

"I am Joe Hopkins, the spy," he said. "This is my friend, Larry Smith. I have important news for Van Dorn. We stopped here for creature comfort. We ride away from here to-night."

Forrest smiled in a sardonic way.

"Very clever," he said. "You do it well, my friend. Very well, indeed. Have you your credentials?"

The curious wording and the hidden significance of the great cavalry leader's remarks gave Jack a start. But he had no idea of exposure.

"Let me see your credentials."

It required a moment or two for Jack to produce the necessary papers. He handed them to General Forrest.

As he did so a sudden chill struck him. What if Forrest knew the real Joe Hopkins. The game would be up.

Forrest read the credentials carefully and nodding slowly said:

"This is very well written. You have covered the field thoroughly. But now will you kindly tell me where you got these papers?"

"Given me by General Bragg."

"That is false! These credentials were stolen, sum and substance."

"Stolen!" gasped Jack.

"Yes, stolen," reiterated Forrest. "You are not Joe Hopkins. I was to meet him hereabouts. I want to inform you that he is one of my most trusted scouts."

Jack gave a gasp and his confidence began to ooze. He saw in an instant that they were in a desperate predicament. They were revealed to Forrest in their true light.

"I wish Hopkins was here!" cried Forrest. "We should have evidence enough to hang you all. So I will simply hold you as prisoners for a time."

He smiled mockingly and then snapped his fingers. Into the room sprung three armed men.

"Arrest this man, guard," he commanded. "We have here a very dangerous type of Union spy."

The effect of all this upon Howe and Lamont was most startling. The planter's eyes bulged from their sockets.

"Eh? What?" he cried. "A spy, after all? Our first suspicions verified, Luke. Bless my soul. General Forrest, isn't this man what he claims to be?"

Forrest laughed again in his sardonic way and snapped his fingers in a contemptuous manner.

"I should say not," he said coldly. "I don't know who he is, but he is not Joe Hopkins."

"But—he has credentials——"

"There is the mystery. I believe that Joe has been taken by the Yankees and that he got the credentials in that way."

To say that Howe and Lamont were astounded would be a mild statement.

"Hang me!" cried the planter. "I never was so durned deceived in my life. But what did ye come here for, ye Yankee?"

"For a good dinner," said Jack coolly. "And we got it. Thanks to your hospitality."

"You've got plenty of cheek," said Howe. "If I had known your true character you can bet you'd never have learned some things from us both about affairs in our army."

"There you are," said Forrest. "It's a Yankee trick. He was getting information out of you."

"Then you'd better hang him," cried the planter.

"I shall send him over to camp first," said the Confederate general. "I want to question him a little."

Jack and Hal saw that it would be folly to resist. There might be a score or more of the Confederates outside.

So they submitted to capture. Their pistols were taken

from them and their arms bound. They stood between the three guards.

It was an unfortunate denouement. Just at the time when their plans seemed bound to succeed they were caught.

They knew that their situation was a desperate one.

Forrest was an inexorable foe. Knowing that they were spies he would not hesitate to order them shot.

But neither Jack nor Hal were of the sort to abandon hope. A hundred schemes for escape were already surging through Jack's brain.

He saw no immediate chance, however. Howe and Lamont had now sufficiently recovered from their astonishment to fully appreciate the situation.

"Well, it beats me!" said the planter, "to think that I could be so fooled by a Yank! Is it true, Forrest, that Sherman is coming down here?"

"No!" replied Forrest. "Sherman is going to march by Tupelo. He would never come over here."

"Another lie nailed!" cried Lamont. "There is no use in leaving Fairview till after the wedding, Osborn."

"That's right!" cried Howe. "I'm sorry you won't be on hand to dance at that wedding, Hopkins."

"I beg you not to waste your sympathy," said Jack coolly. "The wedding may never occur. If the young woman exercises good taste it never will."

Lamont scowled at this. Forrest, who had been listening, asked:

"Wedding? What wedding?"

"My niece, Miss Sybil St. Clair, is to wed with Mr. Lamont here," said Howe.

"Against her will," put in Jack.

"Eh?" exclaimed Forrest. "Is she not willing?"

"She is a bit shy," said Howe smoothly. "Quite young and not yet accustomed to ardent wooing. But Lamont will see that she is made happy."

"No doubt!" said the general. "I wish you luck, sir. But don't forget that women are capricious. Make sure of your game."

"Leave that to me," said Lamont.

But Jack Clark only smiled. He had been quietly working at his hands and now found that he could free one hand. A desperate resolve had seized him.

He was now convinced that the three soldiers with Forrest comprised his entire guard. He made this known to Hal by significant glances.

Forrest now conferred with Howe for some time in an undertone. Finally he turned and said:

"Bear my instructions in mind, Howe. I will send you a heavy guard to-morrow. If those Fairdale Blues are not captured before noon to-morrow I'll resign my commission."

"They have the name of being hard fighters, general," said Howe. "I think it will be well to locate a heavy force here. I understand that they have a field-piece with them."

"I don't care if they have a whole battery," said Forrest. "I intend to attack them in the morning. I shall surround them before they are fairly aware of it."

"I hope ye do!" cried Howe, rubbing his hands. "It'll be luck for the Confederacy."

"I'll wager the Fairdale Blues won't venture so far into the enemy's country again," said Forrest, jeeringly.

He now turned to the door and saluted.

"I shall see you again in the morning, Howe," he said. "I will bring down a heavy detachment to protect your farm."

"Don't forget it," cried Howe. "Good-bye, general, and good luck."

"Good-bye."

Forrest walked out upon the porch. He was followed by his men and the two prisoners.

Jack kept in the rear as much as possible. He had determined to make a desperate attempt to escape.

He had succeeded in freeing his hands. All now depended upon his ability to either give his captors the slip, or else overcome them by personal attack.

The odds were not excessive. It was three against two. Instinctively Jack counted the chances.

He adjudged the three privates to be men of inferior physical capacity. He believed he could successfully meet two of them himself.

With Hal's aid he ought really to be successful. But yet the chances were desperate. He went about his plans carefully and with a system.

Jack knew that Sybil St. Clair had no doubt left the mansion. What would be her emotions when she should learn that her would-be champions were prisoners in the hands of the foe, it was not easy to guess.

But neither Jack nor Hal believed she would relinquish her attempt to escape from her present thralldom. But Jack was deeply interested and anxious to effect her rescue.

At present, however, this looked to be far beyond the range of possibility. The boy-captain was anxious now to get back to the camp of the Blues and at once extricate them from their present perilous position before it was too late.

CHAPTER VI.

BACK IN CAMP.

Jack Clark's fears now were all for his comrades. He knew that, with his superior force, Forrest could surround them and perhaps force them to surrender.

Even if they should succeed in holding off Forrest, there was Van Dorn with his large force coming that way. The case of the Blues looked hopeless.

So Jack realized fully how absolutely necessary it was for him to get back to his comrades at once.

When the two young officers had been arrested in the house, their revolvers had been taken, but they had overlooked a knife which Jack carried in his belt.

The young captain, now that they were outside in the dark, quickly slipped this from his belt and jostling against Hal, severed the cords which held his wrists.

Both prisoners now had the use of their hands. There was a chance.

Four horses were tethered in front of the house. A couple of negroes hovered in the shadows, nearby.

Forrest sprang into the saddle and gave sharp command:

"Tompkins, you and Morton may each take a prisoner up behind you. See that their arms are securely bound."

Now was the time if ever, as Jack well realized. The two guards stepped back to force the prisoners forward. The third guard was untethering the horses.

Quick as a flash Jack swung his right arm about and his fist struck the Confederate like a catapult full in the face.

The fellow turned a complete back somersault and lay groaning on the ground. Hal, on the other hand, hurled the other guard to the ground and like a flash sprang upon the nearest horse. Jack leaped upon the other.

The crack of a carbine rang out upon the air as the third guard fired. General Forrest seemed so astonished that he made no move.

And the two young Union soldiers, with a yell of triumph, gave rein to their horses and went plunging away into the night. Over the five-barred gate they went and down into the highway.

Pursuit was out of the question and the boys knew they were safe. But they did not take chances.

They knew that there were hundreds of Forrest's raiders within call, and that to dally might be fatal. They galloped on down the highway.

In the night it was not easy to get the exact points of the compass, but a happy chance led them to a height of land whence they saw once more the distant glow of the camp-fires at Briar Creek.

Here they drew rein.

"Whew!" cried Hal. "We got out of that scrape by the skin of our teeth, didn't we, Jack?"

"I should say we did," agreed the young captain. "By sunrise we might have decorated the lower branches of some oak tree around here. I hear no sounds of pursuit."

"No."

"Where is our camp?"

Both boys scanned the neighboring ridges of land. Somewhere among them was the camp of the Blues.

"Look!" cried Hal suddenly. "Do you see that faint light over yonder against that high ridge of land?"

Jack rubbed his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "It comes from camp-fires in some hollow below it."

"So I believe. Very likely it is our camp."

"We will investigate."

"One moment," interposed Hal.

"Well?"

"What about the young woman? She was to meet us when we took our leave of the plantation."

"That is so," agreed Jack. "But this unforeseen occurrence has seemed to change our plans. It is too late to go back. It is necessary to rejoin our comrades as quickly as possible and prepare for an attack which is almost certain to come."

This was a fact not to be disputed. While the boys were deeply in sympathy with Sybil St. Clair they realized the necessity of at once rejoining their company. Failure to do this might mean its destruction.

So they turned their horses' heads toward the glow of light under the distant ridge. After some time spent in threading their way through the ravine the camp-fires burst upon their view.

A sharp hail came out of the gloom.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends!" replied Jack.

"Advance friends, with the countersign."

"Lincoln is our choice."

"Great Cæsar!" cried the picket. "It's our captain and our lieutenant, too."

"That is right, Stanley," said Jack with a laugh. "And I can tell you we are lucky to be here."

"Is that so?" cried the guard. "Are we in danger of attack?"

"Not immediate. But the foe are all about us—thousands of them. It will be an easy matter for them to march down here and wipe us out."

"Ginger! What will you do?"

"That's the question."

"Will we retreat?"

"That is against orders," said Jack. "No we can only wait for daylight and then decide what to do. But every camp-fire must be put out."

A few moments later Jack and Hal were in the camp. They were surrounded by the boys, to whom they explained much.

By Jack's order the camp-fires were extinguished. Every picket guard was doubled and the boys slept on their arms.

The suspense of that night was never forgotten by the Blues.

All were on the qui vive, expecting every moment to hear the pickets' guns announcing that the foe were coming. But the hours wore away and nothing of the kind occurred.

When the Blues had started on their march Jack had applied for and obtained a couple of field-pieces. These had brought up the rear of the company. Men experienced in handling them accompanied the guns.

So that, with this bit of artillery, the Blues felt quite strong. They might hold their own against an ordinary force of the foe.

But Forrest's command, of course, would be too heavy for them. But Jack had no idea of a retreat.

"I don't like the word," he said. "It has no place in a soldier's category. Sometimes it may be necessary in military evolution to fall back or retire. We will not retreat, nor will we retire, until Van Dorn comes up and presses us."

"That is all right," said Hal. "But if we are surrounded what will save us?"

Jack could not help but see that here was a contingency which General Grant had probably not counted upon when he gave Jack his orders.

The appearance of Forrest on the scene had quite changed

the situation. With Van Dorn on one side and Forrest on the other, the position of the Blues seemed hopeless.

It seemed neither possible to advance nor retire without the certainty of capture or annihilation. That they could hope to win with their absurdly small force was most ridiculous.

Jack Clark, therefore, could be excused for some anxiety in the matter.

There was no sleep for the boy-captain that night.

He paced the picket line, going from guard to guard, in an anxious spirit. It was near morning when he heard a sudden hail:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

For a moment there was no answer. Then Jack was given a start as he heard a querulous voice:

"Ise ole Jim, sah, an' Ise brung mah young missy to see de captain, sah. Jes' tell yo' captain dat."

In an instant Jack rushed down to the picket line.

"All right, guard," he cried. "Let them pass. Miss St. Clair, this is a pleasure."

Sybil, trembling and nervous and wrapped closely in a long cloak, passed the guard and stood before Jack. The faithful old negro was just behind her and with him was a fat colored woman.

"I have come, Captain Clark," said Sybil in apprehensive tones. "I don't know how it all will end. But you told me to come."

"Certainly!" cried Jack, heartily. "And I can assure you all that is possible will be done to aid you."

"You are kind."

"It is no more than you have a right to ask. Come right up to my tent. It is at your disposal, henceforth."

Sybil, with the old black mammy and old Jim, followed Jack into the camp of the Blues. Jack at once placed the tent at her disposal.

Mammy Lou, who was an old negress of apparent resource, soon had things comfortable for her young mistress. Jack sent an order to the company commissary for such rations as could be had.

"You will find it a little rough, Miss Sybil," he said. "A soldier's life is a hard one. But we shall soon hope to send you north among friends."

"I am willing to share any hardship," replied the spirited young girl. "I would even welcome death, rather than a return to Fairview and marriage with Luke Lamont."

"Did you learn the reason why we did not meet you as agreed?"

"Yes. Jim told me all. It seems that General Forrest penetrated your disguise."

"He did. But we overpowered his guard and made our escape."

"For that I am very glad. I trust you will be able to hold your own against him. But I have heard that General Van Dorn was coming this way with a heavy force."

"Yes," replied Jack. "I don't think General Grant counted upon the presence of Forrest here or he would not have sent us here."

"I wish I was a man that I might do my part in giving you aid."

Jack laughed and replied:

"I am sure you would be a good soldier. Now you will excuse me, for I have much to do."

Jack hurried away. Day was breaking and the drummer boy was beating the reveille. The Blues turned out for roll-call in quick order.

Then camp-fires were lighted and they proceeded to get ready their breakfast.

Jack and Hal now were discussing the possibility of a retreat.

"I see no other way but to fall back," declared the boy-captain. "If Forrest attacks us here, we shall be surrounded. There is a chance we may succeed in getting within hailing distance of reinforcements."

"I believe you," said Hal. "But listen! What is that?"

The crack of muskets smote upon the air. The sound came from the ravine to the west of their position.

In an instant the Blues were called to arms. They rallied quickly and the two field-pieces were quickly shotted and made ready for attack.

In a few moments several of the picket guards came running in.

"The enemy are in force in the ravine," said a sergeant. "We have been fired upon and answered their fire."

Jack's face grew grim.

He ran quickly to the edge of the descent. He saw gray lines forming far below. He knew at once that Forrest had come up and was preparing to attack.

CHAPTER VII.

REINFORCEMENTS.

Jack Clark knew that he faced a terrible peril. The foe outnumbered them twenty to one.

If they had charged up that slope, the fire of the Blues would slaughter them frightfully. But if they should keep coming, the end could be foreseen.

But the young captain had made up his mind to resist to the utmost. No thought of surrender had come to him.

He spoke encouraging words to the boys. He gave keen, quick orders.

The two field-pieces were rolled forward to the edge of the descent. Their muzzles were depressed and grape and canister were hurled into the ravine.

Forrest himself could be seen fiercely directing his men.

Now they came on up the ascent at the double-quick. A fierce, desperate-looking crew they were.

Few of them had uniforms. Most of them were dressed in butternut jeans. They were, however, armed with deadly rifles. Their courage was typical.

On they came, a legion of them.

It was heart-sickening to look at that desperate and fierce body of ill-fed, miserably-clad men coming to battle

More formidable did they look than any serried rank of regular troops in bright uniforms, sleek and well-fed.

These men were fighters. They valued life not so much as a six-pence. Gaunt and hungry, like human wolves, they advanced to meet their death, or to win victory.

Jack's nerve almost failed him as he looked at them. A less experienced man might have felt contempt and pity for them.

But not Jack Clark. He knew that this was one of the best fighting machines in the service. He knew that men in their condition were more efficient.

So he gave cool, stern orders, and stood there in plain view and exposed, while bullets sped about him like hail. He seemed to bear a charmed life.

"Mercy on us, Jack!" cried Hal. "Don't risk your life that way. It is awful! We can't lose our captain!"

Jack now stepped back, a little out of range, for he knew that discretion was valor's better part. But he held his men with the very magnetism of his presence.

"Steady, boys!" he called. "Now give it to them!"

The muskets crackled. A blinding volley was delivered. But it only for an instant checked the mass of men coming up the hill.

What was the volley of a handful of men like the Blues against those thousands? It was hardly the sting of a bee to a mad bull.

On came Forrest's crew. But Jack's sword now was raised. The two field-pieces loaded to the muzzle were run forward and faced the foe.

Some in the advancing ranks saw them and fell on their faces. But the two guns spoke with a roar like thunder.

The grape-shot went down through the gray ranks, opening great gaps and throwing the line into confusion. Again Jack gave the order:

"Load with grape! Give it to them again!"

By the time the Confederate line had reformed, another roar went up and again a storm of grape-shot went tearing through the ranks.

But the Confederates were now close to the guns. Jack gave a sharp order and they were run back some yards.

Then the thrilling order went up:

"Fix bayonets! Charge!"

The troop of Blues, with bayonets fixed, rushed forward and swept the Confederates back over the brow of the hill. There was desperate fighting, but Forrest's men were hurled back.

The field-pieces now opened again and this completed the repulse. They retired to the other side of the ravine.

When they did this, Jack ordered his men to cease firing. There was no use in wasting ammunition.

It was a humiliating surprise to Forrest to have his men repulsed thus. But the great Confederate leader was not the one to abandon a project.

He began to reform his men for another charge. They were in line and even moved toward the Blues' position.

But they did not come. Jack never knew the reason why, but he guessed it, for from his position he saw an orderly ride up and hand Forrest a message.

A few moments later the raiders began to fall back.

They retired beyond a distant ridge and soon the curl of smoke showed that they had gone into camp.

It was a matter of much amazement to the Blues.

That a force so much larger should thus submit to a repulse seemed altogether out of reason.

"There's something behind that, Jack," said Hal. "And you can bet on it."

"Well, what?"

"I believe Forrest has received orders from a superior to hold back. Perhaps it is Van Dorn, who may be coming up on the other side of us."

Jack saw that this was no doubt true. It added to his apprehension.

"Hal," he said. "We are in a hard box. We are bound to be surrounded."

"It looks bad."

"But we won't surrender."

"Never!"

"My plan is to intrench ourselves here and hold out to the last."

"That settles it. I will put the boys to work at once."

The supply wagons had been packed in the cover of the hillside near. From them shovels and picks were distributed.

Then the Blues began work.

The way they made the earth fly was a caution. The digging was easy, and soon deep lines of trenches with heavy breastworks were hastily erected.

On these breastworks the guns were placed so that they would command the ascent. If they were attacked on the other side, through the woods, they still could turn the guns about.

While they were thus engaged, suddenly a great surprise was accorded them. The distant roll of a drum was heard.

Over a ridge to the east swarmed a line of soldiers. The Blues instinctively gripped their muskets, looking for a rear attack.

But the next moment they rubbed their eyes in doubt and surprise. Could they believe their senses?

The newcomers wore uniforms of blue and seemed in heavy force. The Stars and Stripes waved over them.

A great cheer went up from the beleaguered Blues. It was answered by the distant column.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"By ginger! What do you make of that, Jack?" exclaimed Hal.

"We shall soon know," said the boy-captain, "but it looks to me very much like reinforcements."

"I hope so."

Rapidly now the advancing column of Union troops drew near. They filed out into the woods and came toward the camp of the Blues.

Jack sprang upon his horse and rode out to meet them. Their colonel, who was on a white horse, came to meet him.

Jack saluted and then a sharp cry escaped him:

"Colonel Spencer!" he cried. "What has brought you here?"

"This will explain," said the colonel of the Indiana Volunteers, as he handed Jack a letter. "I have come by a forced march to join you. This letter is from General Grant and will explain all."

Jack quickly read the letter.

"Headquarters, Army of the Tennessee:

"To Captain Jack Clark: The bearer, Colonel Spencer, will join you with his regiment of one thousand men. I have learned that a move is on foot by Van Dorn to cut you off. Intrench yourself in front of the enemy and hold him off as long as you can. While Colonel Spencer is with you, you will rank him in command.

"Signed: U. S. GRANT."

Jack folded the message and looked at Colonel Spencer.

"Do you know the contents of this?" he asked. The colonel nodded.

"I do," he replied. "I know that you are to rank me in command."

"Very well, colonel. Bring your men into our intrenchments. Have you a supply train?"

"I have, and in plenty," was the reply. "I will pack my wagons with yours."

"Very good, colonel. As soon as your men are in camp report to me. I want to consult with you upon the best means of defense."

The colonel saluted and was pleased. It is galling to the average military officer to be outranked by an inferior. But Jack made no officious display of authority.

In a short time Colonel Spencer's regiment was in camp and his supply train was packed. He had brought with him a couple of rifled cannons. These were now mounted upon the breastworks.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues were much cheered by this unexpected reinforcement.

With eleven hundred men and four guns behind breastworks and in a good position, Jack believed that they could hold their ground for quite a while.

Of course, a concerted attack by Van Dorn with heavy batteries would drive them out of their trenches. But in the meantime it was likely that General Grant would make a diversion elsewhere to draw Van Dorn's attention.

A chilling thought came to the boy-captain once.

He knew the desperate game of war often demanded heavy sacrifice. Were his men and Spencer's to be thus sacrificed to enable the main army to effect an important manoeuvre? For a moment he felt uncomfortable.

Then it came to him that this could not be, for Grant would never have sent him such heavy reinforcements.

In any event, it was the game of war and it is a soldier's duty to accept death to gain a desired end.

Soon Colonel Spencer came up to make his report, and in company with him Jack walked through the trenches.

They discussed the situation carefully and in detail. It was decided to run another line of trenches along the northern side of the hill.

A detail of several hundred men were set to work upon this. In a short while they had completed their task.

The position of the Blues now was a most formidable one.

They were well intrenched, with a deep gully on two sides, woods and a plain on the other.

If an attack was made with much show of success it must be from the latter quarter. And here the trenches were the deepest and strongest.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE TRENCHES.

In all their after career none of the Blues ever forgot those days in the trenches at Fairview Plantation.

Forrest seemed content to rest idle on the distant ridges to the east.

On the other side there was no sign of a foe. It would have been feasible for the Blues now to have made an escape in this direction.

But Jack bore in mind General Grant's orders which were to stay there.

So he remained where he was. Every day some new improvement was added to their defenses.

But after three days had passed then a startling fact became apparent to the Union defenders.

They were getting short of rations. This would mean serious things, for starvation would threaten them.

Was it the purpose of Forrest to starve them out?

Colonel Spencer asked this question of Jack. The boy-captain replied:

"There is one thing we can do. We can send out foraging posts to the east of us. We are not hemmed in on that side."

"That is right," replied the colonel. "I would suggest that it be tried."

"Very well."

Jack sent for Corporal Tom Peters, whom he knew to be an adept in the art of foraging. The little corporal responded at once.

"Tom," said Jack, "I want you to take a detail of men and see what you can find for supplies in the country east of us. If you find a planter who has plenty, buy of him what you can. If he won't sell, seize it; but leave him a reasonable amount."

"All right, captain," replied Peters. "I am your man. That is just the job I like."

"I thought so."

"I'll bring you back some stuff."

So presently Peters and his detail left the camp. It was not an hour later that Jack, making a round of the trenches, heard a distant musket shot.

Looking out toward the woods he saw a number of figures in blue running toward the intrenchments.

He recognized the short, fat figure of Corporal Peters. In a few moments the corporal came up breathlessly:

"They're coming, captain," he cried. "There's thousands of them. Old Van Dorn is leading them."

"What!" exclaimed Jack. "Are you sure of that?"

"Sure of it? Well, I should say so. Just go out beyond the woods there if you want to see."

At once there was commotion in the camp. The report that the enemy was coming caused great excitement.

At once the trenches were manned. The heaviest guns were brought to this side of the intrenchment.

This had hardly been accomplished when the pickets came in. They reported the enemy advancing in force.

Then through the woods they saw the glitter of bayonets.

This was a different force advancing upon them now, from the half-starved reprobate crew of Forrest.

They were well equipped, wearing gray uniforms and were armed with effective rifles. The Confederate flag showed in the open.

The Confederates halted in the edge of the woods.

Then a white flag was seen to flutter in the air. A couple of sergeants bearing it approached.

Jack stepped out to meet them. The foremost saluted and said:

"General Van Dorn sends you his respects and asks you to surrender."

"Very kind of General Van Dorn," said Jack with sarcasm. "Kindly return and tell him that I cannot comply with his request."

"Then you won't surrender?"

"No! Why should I?"

"We have a bigger force and we shall carry your works."

"Do you think so? I shall give you all possible chance to try it. If you attempt it you will get a hot reception, I tell you."

"Then you refuse?"

"I do."

The two emissaries departed. It was hardly an instant after they reached the woods when fire was opened upon the intrenchments.

At once the guns answered and grape and canister was hurled into the woods. It was with deadly effect, too, for the Confederates quickly fell back.

Wishing to save his ammunition Jack now ceased firing.

Only volleys of musketry were exchanged. But this did not last long.

Suddenly from the forest there burst a long gray line. There was another line behind it, and still another behind that.

It was plain that a charge was to be made.

At once the defenders of the trenches felt their veins quicken. They waited with every nerve on the alert.

Across the intervening space came the charging line of Confederates. It was a fearful, thrilling moment.

That long line of glittering bayonets might strike terror to the hearts of many brave men. But the Blues did not falter for a moment.

On came the Confederates. Then Jack Clark gave the order:

"Ready! Fire! Give it to 'em, boys!"

The guns boomed and grape-shot went tearing through the ranks of the gray-clad foe. The musketry mowed them down.

The first line fell back in confusion. But a young officer, whom Jack noted for conspicuous gallantry, rallied them.

The next line came up. On they came in spite of the deadly fire. Now they were right at the breastworks.

It did not seem as if the Fairdale Blues could withstand the fury of that awful charge. The Confederates were almost over the breastworks when Jack Clark once more rallied his boys.

"At them, Blues!" he shouted, springing to the big gun himself. "Drive them back! Hold them! Don't let them get over!"

With a wild, ringing cheer, the Blues sprung upon the breastworks and hurled the line of the foe back.

Fierce and awful was that struggle. Spencer and his men also distinguished themselves.

The Confederates were hurled back in disorder. The cannons opened again and they fled to the cover of the woods.

Van Dorn was repulsed.

Eleven hundred desperate Union men in the trenches had repulsed a force of several thousand. It was a mighty and a valiant deed.

Back to the woods went the disgruntled Confederates, leaving scores of dead and dying on the ground.

So effectual was the repulse that the attack was not at once repeated.

The Blues were glad to gain a respite. Their loss had been small. In all there had been perhaps a dozen killed and a score wounded. Most of the latter were among Spencer's men.

Again and again the Blues cheered as they realized what they had done. It was hardly necessary to say that the Confederates were chagrined.

The day was rapidly waning. The Confederates now withdrew beyond the reach of shells from the Union guns.

They proceeded to make camp, and now it was apparent to Jack that they were really surrounded. What the next move would be he could only guess.

But the young captain did not believe that they would attack again that night.

However, men were kept at the guns and sentries were placed at close intervals in the trenches.

Colonel Spencer, grim and powdered-blackened and bleeding from a number of slight wounds, accosted Jack.

"Well, captain, we turned them back."

"Yes," agreed Jack. "But I fear it may be only temporary. They may come next time in greater force."

"They must do so in order to succeed."

"They almost had us."

"That is true. On the other hand they didn't get us. Our gunners did great work."

"So they did."

"I am satisfied."

"I am not," said Jack, bluntly.

Spencer looked astonished.

"How is that?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I consider that although we have repulsed the foe, we are still in the very worst of scrapes."

"Will you explain?"

"It is too much to hope that either Van Dorn or Forrest will draw off and leave us here undisturbed."

"What matter if they don't as long as we can hold them?"

"Oh, there's the rub. If we had a month's rations it would be easy. But a very few days would bring our men to the desperate condition of starvation."

Colonel Spencer contracted his brows.

"You are right, Clark," he said. "That is our greatest problem. We have only supplies enough for another day."

"That is desperate, indeed."

"So it is. There is no chance to forage. When the worst comes we can only try to cut our way out."

"That would mean annihilation."

The problem was certainly a serious one. Jack went to his tent and sat down to study it.

He saw but one ray of hope.

If Grant should make some sort of a diversion he might draw Van Dorn away. In that case, the Blues could keep up a running fight with Forrest and manage to reach the country beyond where supplies might be obtained.

Darkness now shut down.

The Confederate camps were now seen gleaming on every ridge about them. The night was dark and there was just a hint of rain in the air.

Jack walked the trenches and studied the situation. Crossing to his tent he met a slender female figure.

"Oh, Captain Clark!" said a sweet female voice. "How bravely your boys fought. Do you think the foe will attack again?"

"I cannot say, Miss St. Clair," said Jack. "But it is likely they will."

Just then a guard of three men came walking along with a Confederate prisoner between them. Jack gave a start as he recognized him as the brave young officer who had led his men to the verge of the breastworks.

It seemed that he had ventured over the verge and been captured by Spencer's men. His bravery had so impressed Jack that he unconsciously saluted him. The young Confederate's face flushed and then turned deadly white as his gaze rested upon the face of Sybil St. Clair. The young girl herself started forward with a thrilling cry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MORNING ATTACK.

"Harold! Harold May!" pealed from Sybil's lips as she rushed forward, disregarding the guards. The next moment she was clasped in the arms of the young Confederate officer.

One of the guards put a hand on her arm, but Jack said sternly:

"Let them alone! You may go and leave the prisoner with me."

The guards turned and marched away. Jack folded his arms and turned his back upon the lovers. It was some moments before Sybil recovered herself sufficiently to understand the situation.

Then she turned and seeing that the guards had gone realized the courtesy of Jack's act.

"Captain Clark," she said in a firm voice, "I know what you have done for me. I know your kind heart. You assisted me to escape from the man whom I could not marry. Now, I will with pleasure, make you acquainted with the man whom I have promised to marry."

Jack turned and faced the young Confederate officer. He, however, said:

"You forget, Sybil! I am a prisoner of war!"

"That does not matter, sir," said Jack, holding out his hand in a hearty manner. "You have been unfortunate. I can afford to be generous. Certainly I will not be churlish."

Harold May gripped hands with the boy-captain of the Blues.

"I have heard much of you and your company, Captain Clark," he said. "I know that all the good things said about you are true now. Although we are foes we may at least meet with respect."

"I reciprocate your sentiment," said Jack warmly. "And though you are the victim of misfortune in one respect just now, I believe you are the most fortunate man in the world in another."

He bowed to Sybil who made a deep curtsy. Harold May made reply:

"I am a partisan of the Southern cause and yet my heart has been won by a partisan—yes, I say it, a strict partisan of the Northern cause. Am I not in an awkward position?"

"There is certainly the deepest of reason why the North and South should become reconciled," said Jack.

Harold May held out his hand.

"Give me your hand on that, Clark," he said. "May that day soon come. I think it is all a bitter mistake, anyway. I am heart-sick of the whole thing and I know there are others who feel the same way."

"It will be a glad hour for the country when peace comes," said Jack. "Lieutenant May, I do not intend to place the usual restriction upon you while a prisoner in this camp. Your parole is all I require and the liberty of the camp is yours."

"You have it and I thank you for the courtesy," replied May, eagerly. "This is generous treatment, Captain Clark."

"I shall not forget you, Captain Clark," said Sybil, whose eyes were like stars.

"I am glad to serve you, Miss St. Clair," replied Jack, touching his cap. "But I must go now. I trust you will be comfortable, though I fear that we may be short of rations if the enemy holds us besieged."

Jack hurried away, leaving the two lovers to themselves. Just then a corporal of the guard approached him.

"Captain Clark!" he said.

"Well?" asked Jack.

"Post number four reports that a messenger has applied to him with a message for you."

He handed Jack a folded note. The boy-captain, not a little surprised, took it.

Post number four was the picket guard on the side of the encampment overlooking the ravine which Forrest had tried to scale.

Jack unfolded the note and read:

"Captain Clark: I have information that you at present have my niece in your lines, she having set my authority at defiance and run away. I hereby notify you to send her back at once, or I shall take measures to invade your camp and enforce the law in that respect. For abduction in the South the penalty is death on the gallows. I hope you will give this your attention at once. Waiting for your reply, I am,
Yours,
OSBORN HOWE."

Jack read this epistle with genuine amusement. He was at first impelled to call the attention of Sybil to it.

But on second thought he decided not to do so. With a pencil he wrote on the back of the note as follows:

"My dear Howe: I am sorry that I cannot feel at liberty to accede to your very simple request. The truth is, the young woman came here of her own free will and my Northern notions of hospitality forbid my sending her away, so long as she chooses to remain my guest. Moreover, chance has placed a prisoner in our hands, Lieutenant May, and this offers her an extra inducement to remain here. Confessing my powerlessness in the matter, and hoping that you will cheerfully reconsider your decision to hang me, I beg to remain, yours hopefully,

"JACK CLARK."

Jack turned to the guard.

"The messenger is waiting for a reply?" he asked.

"He is!"

"Very good. Kindly give him this."

The guard departed while Jack laughed and chuckled, and unable to keep the story, carried it to Hal.

The young lieutenant was indeed as greatly amused.

"He must have been intoxicated when he wrote you that letter," he said. "It is the most unusual epistle I ever read."

"It is certainly a strange freak."

"I don't believe you will accede to his request."

"Hardly. I doubt if he will find it easy to carry out his threat."

"I don't know," said Hal. "We are not out of the woods yet. Things really look dubious for us. To be sure we have repulsed the enemy to-day. But we must not forget that they may overwhelm us to-morrow."

"That is true," said Jack. "But they cannot deliver me up to Howe to be hung, just to suit his whim. Van Dorn is a man of honor."

It was a late hour when Jack Clark retired for a brief

spell of slumber. He slept for some time, but was finally awakened by Hal himself, who entered his tent.

Jack started up to see the young lieutenant bending over him.

"What is the matter?" he asked sharply.

"Sh! rise and come with me," said Hal.

Jack did so. As he stepped outside of his tent he saw that there was a fine rain in the air. The embers of a camp-fire sputtered and flickered.

In the faint light he saw that which gave him a start.

Opeechuck, the Indian, stood motionless by the fire. His head was bent low and his arms folded on his breast.

"Now, Opeechuck," said Hal, "tell the captain your story."

The Indian raised his head.

"White man who drive niggers, over there," he said, pointing to the ridge above the camp. "Me go out. Pass their guard. See everything in their camp. Heap big army, lots of guns. They come at daybreak over there—so! and blue soldiers be ready or they drive him out. Mebbe they surround us, and starve us. White chief talk heap big."

Jack listened with interest. He knew that the Indian was reliable and that he meant what he said.

That he had really passed the Confederate picket guard and entered their camp he had no doubt. Opeechuck was like a shadow in the darkness.

"Then you think they will attack us at daybreak over the ridge?" asked Jack.

The Indian bowed gravely.

"Opeechuck sure!" he said. "Big chief say so. All others say so. Guns brought up there. Soldier in blue go now, make surprise and many prisoners."

Jack saw the point.

"By jingo, Hal!" he cried. "I believe Opeechuck is right. It would be a clever move for us to move out and anticipate their little game. That is, to surprise them before they can surprise us."

"You are right," agreed Hal. "Let us adopt the plan."

"We will. What is the hour? Four of the clock? That is enough. We will move at once. See to it that two companies of our men turn out at once. Make no noise. Let every man carry plenty of powder and ball."

Hal sped away. The order was quickly executed. The two companies named by Hal turned out instantly.

They were quickly ready and at once crept up over the ridge. Jack knew well the advantage they held.

The Confederates, in order to reach a point of attack from this point, must clamber up a steep little ascent. The Union marksmen could wait in the underbrush above them and when they should come in sight could easily sweep them back with a destructive fire.

The Blues reached the summit of the ridge and silently waited in their ambush. Far away in the east a faint light was beginning to appear.

The darkness was yet intense. But far below the sound of muffled movements came plainly to Jack's ears. He knew well what it meant.

The enemy were coming. The Blues waited tensely. Every moment the sky grew brighter.

Now, looking down that side of the ridge, Jack saw figures moving. They were coming up the ascent silently.

He saw the lines of gray-clad soldiers and the gleam of their bayonets. He held his breath a moment and then turning to the boys said:

"Get ready! Take careful aim!"

The little body of Blues quickly bent forward and took aim. Nearer came the gray line. Suddenly the word was given.

From two hundred muskets leaped a volley which seemed to echo and reverberate like thunder through the region. Flame and smoke flashed upon the murky air.

Shouts and yells followed. Jack knew that the volley had been effective.

"Load!" he commanded. "Fire as rapidly as you can! Don't let a man get over this ridge!"

The Blues needed no further orders. They kept up a hot fire. The charging gray line fell back and melted.

The attack was repulsed. The clever scheme of the wily Confederate general was overthrown. Once again the Blues were triumphant.

They filled the air with their wild cheers of confidence and of success. These were answered with the yells of the foe.

As daylight increased the exact line of the foe was easily located. The battle now waxed hot.

Jack sent back for reinforcements.

"Tell Spencer to send another hundred men," he cried.

"He must spare them. Success is ours if we can only throw them back again. We will never surrender."

CHAPTER X.

A WARNING.

Nearer came the charging Confederate line now. They meant to carry the ridge if it was possible.

On the other hand Jack Clark was determined to hold it.

Spencer's men now came up at the double-quick. Also one of the field-pieces was brought along with them.

This was quickly trained upon the foe. A storm of grape and canister was sent down among them.

They wavered and finally drew back. They did not return to the attack.

Once again Van Dorn had been repulsed. But now firing was heard on the other side toward the ravine.

Jack knew what this meant.

"Stay here, Hal," he said. "Hold the ridge. I think Forrest is trying again to carry our breastworks."

"Give him Joppa," cried Hal. "I'll hold this place just as long as I can."

"Good for you, Hal. Do your best. Don't let them get half way up."

"Be sure I won't."

Jack hastened away down to the scene of the other attack. It was just as he had surmised.

The foe under Forrest were coming to the attack. They were swarming up the side of the ravine.

The Blues were hurling shot and shell into the ravine. The musketry fire was destructive. The raiders made a daring attempt to get up the height.

But again they were driven back. The slaughter was awful. Back to the bottom of the ravine they were driven.

Nothing human could stand before that fire. After an hour of incessant endeavor to carry the height, Forrest's men drew off.

The second attempt to carry the intrenchments of the Blues had proved a failure. They cheered wildly.

But now the attacking Confederates seemed to have abandoned the attempt to capture the position. They retired sullenly.

The camp of Forrest could be seen on the other side of the ravine. On the other hand was Van Dorn.

Really, the Blues were making a most wonderful stand against odds. One thing was greatly in their favor. Their position was a difficult one to assail.

The forenoon passed without another attempt at assault by the foe. Jack Clark walked back and forth, perplexed by many hard problems.

Several times already he had changed his views as to what was the best move to make next. He knew that the problem of food and drink was soon to threaten them. In fact it did already threaten them.

His only hope lay in the assumption that General Grant would come to his support from the rear, and that Van Dorn would be driven back.

In this case the Blues would be safe. It would simply clinch a great victory for them.

But Jack did not feel sure that Grant would be able to come to their rescue. For aught he knew, beyond those distant hills disaster might be overtaking the great Army of the Tennessee.

Those were anxious hours for Jack Clark in the trenches surrounded by the foe.

He was pacing thus moodily up and down the intrenchments when a light step sounded in his rear. He turned like a flash to face Opeechuck, the Natchez.

The Indian stood before him with folded arms and regarded him with a piercing gaze.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "White soldiers soon be hungry. Mebbe starve! Mebbe die!"

Jack looked searchingly at the red man.

"Well, that is true, Opeechuck," he said. "We have but little food. What shall we do?"

The Indian's face never quivered. He spoke in his usual stoical way.

"Mebbe Oppechuck get food."

"You!" exclaimed Jack in surprise. "How can that be?"

"Me show you," said the Indian confidently. "Soldiers in gray have plenty. Mebbe Opeechuck get some from them."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Jack. "Do you think they would give you rations for us?"

"No," said Opeechuck. "Me go take. Me find way to wagons. Heap food there. Me bring some back."

Jack gazed at the Natchez wonderingly. He knew that the wonderful cunning and woodcraft of the savage would enable him to easily elude the enemy's pickets, for he had repeatedly passed through their guard line. But that he could bring back food seemed incredible.

However, he said warmly:

"Opeechuck, you are brave and discreet. But I fear that you may get caught and we can't afford to lose you."

The Indian gave a contemptuous shrug.

"Gray soldiers a lot of squaws," he said. "Me fool them easy. You see, to-night."

Then Opeechuck leaned forward and lowered his voice. He spoke in a whisper and an impressive manner:

"White chief keep eyes open. Squaw soldier in camp. Let gray soldier in when it is dark. Kill quick."

The Indian flourished his arms excitedly. Jack was astounded.

The Natchez's words were ambiguous, but his manner was expressive of his meaning.

"What!" he exclaimed, with sudden pallor. "Do you mean to say we have a traitor in camp?"

"White chief believe Opeechuck. Me know all. You see."

Jack's face hardened.

"Point him out to me," he said. But Opeechuck shook his head.

"He not here now. You see! Wait for Opeechuck. He show you—mebbe to-night."

Then the Indian glided away.

It need hardly be said that Jack was greatly disturbed by the Indian's words. That there was a traitor in their midst he could of course believe possible.

But how he could do them harm was a question. If he should chance to be on the picket line of course there would be an opportunity, for he might let a surprise party through the lines.

Of the possibility of this though, Jack was quite skeptical. However, he was determined to make sure of his pickets.

Filled with the spirit of his information he went to Colonel Spencer and told him of Opeechuck's warning.

The colonel was astonished.

"I can hardly believe it," he said. "I don't think I have a man in my regiment who would do anything of that kind."

"It is impossible to tell," said Jack. "The traitor would be sure to cover his tracks well. He may be one of our most trusted men."

"I can't believe it!"

"It is hard for me to credit it. But I know that Opeechuck is sincere."

"He may be mistaken."

Jack shook his head.

"Opeechuck is an Indian," he said. "He has all the

surety of discretion and the clever perspicacity of his race. He is hardly likely to be wrong."

"I will admit that," said the colonel. "It is a matter worthy of deep investigation. We must be on our guard."

"That is true, Colonel Spencer."

Jack now took his leave and went back to his own tent, where he met Hal. To him he imparted the same information.

The young lieutenant's eyes flashed.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "I know who the scoundrel is!"

Jack was startled.

"You do?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well—who is he?"

"Preston Carr, the bugler in Spencer's regiment. Last night I know he was beyond our lines. Call the guard of post number four."

Jack turned and looked at his roster. A complete record of the posting of every guard was kept by the company clerk. He placed his finger on the name:

"Everitt Williams! He is one of Spencer's men."

"Yes."

Then Jack raised his voice.

"Peters!" he called.

In a moment the fat little corporal appeared in the tent entrance. He saluted and said:

"On duty, sir."

"Very good, Tom," said Jack. "I want you to go over to Spencer's trenches and find Everitt Williams, who was post number four, picket guard, last night."

"All right, sir."

The little corporal sped away. Hal looked at Jack and asked:

"I say, old man, how did you find this out?"

"Opeechuck gave me warning. He insisted that there was a traitor in our camp, but he would not name him."

"It is a terrible thing to think of, Jack."

"So it is."

"I am glad it is not one of our boys."

"So am I."

"Really, our situation here is likely to grow desperate. If our rations fail us there is no telling what hour we may be forced to surrender."

"We can hold out a week, I think. By that time General Grant ought to be able to send us aid."

"I hope so. That is my one ray of hope. Van Dorn will, of course, not remain here with his whole force. He may leave a couple of regiments or may turn us over to Forrest. In any event, the force will be too strong for us to cut our way through."

"I fear so."

Just then in the tent entrance there appeared Corporal Peters. Behind him was a thin-faced soldier, who saluted and stood at attention. The corporal withdrew.

"You are Everitt Williams?" asked Jack.

"I am, sir."

"Were you post number four last night?"

"I was, sir," replied the picket.

"Did anyone pass in or out through you last night?" asked Jack. The picket hesitated and then replied:

"None passed in save one who went out and came back a little after midnight."

"Ah!" said Jack quietly. "Who was that?"

"I think it was our bugler, Preston Carr. He got back just before the morning attack, I think."

Jack and Hal exchanged glances.

"That will do, Williams," said the young captain. "By the way, mind that you say nothing of this matter to anyone."

The picket looked curious but replied:

"I have your orders, sir."

"Very good. You may go."

The picket departed. For some moments after he had gone Jack and Hal sat intently gazing at each other. It was a deep shock to them.

"A traitor in our camp," said Hal. "We may draw many inferences. It is easy to assume that he may have had something to do with that morning attack."

"You are right."

"There is but one course left for us. Of course we have no evidence against him. He must be watched."

"He is watched."

"By whom?"

"By Opeechuck, the Natchez," declared Jack. "He cannot deceive him."

CHAPTER XI.

PLANNING THE TRAP.

"Where is Opeechuck?" asked Hal.

"A moment since he was out yonder at the trenches. I can call him."

"I wish you would. Let us question him further."

"Very good."

Jack called Peters again. The little corporal received his orders and went to look for the Indian. He returned some time later to report:

"I am sorry, captain, but Opeechuck is not in the camp."

"He has gone out foraging," said Jack.

"Foraging!" gasped Hal.

"Yes."

"Why, how can he get beyond the lines? A mouse could hardly do that."

"But Opeechuck is not a mouse. He is an Indian, and you should know that the enemy's lines are as an open door to his clever strategy."

Hal drew a deep breath.

"I believe you," he said. "I don't see how he does it, but I know from personal observation that it is in his power. We shall have to wait till he returns."

"There is evidently no other way."

So the matter was dropped for the time. Jack went out

to supervise the construction of a new line of trenches on the ridge at the east of the camp.

Hal occupied himself with the company's books. While Jack was occupied in his task he heard footsteps behind him and turned to see Lieutenant May and Sybil approaching him.

There was a cloud upon May's face and an anxious light in his eyes.

"Captain Clark," he said, "I have a matter of importance to present to you."

"Oh!" said Jack. "What is it? I hope it is nothing serious."

Sybil blushed and averted her face. But the lieutenant held in his hand a bit of note-paper. He gave it to Jack, saying:

"Here is something which came to me last night. The old negro, Jim, has a way of passing through the enemy's lines and while in the neighborhood of Fairview last night he came across one of my corporals, who sent me this message. I think it will explain itself."

Jack read the message with a sense of appreciation, for it enlightened him greatly.

"Dear Lieutenant May: We have heard that you are safe in the Blues' camp and that you are not sorry to be there for a certain reason of which I need not speak. All the boys send their respects to the happy young woman, and wish her great joy. But, I want to warn you of a foul game which is under way here to undo you. There is a conspiracy laid by Lamont and Howe, with the aid of a traitor in the Blues' camp, to steal the young woman away after dark. It is their game to creep in by the picket, drug her and carry her out. This is fair warning. I hope your exchange will soon be effected and you will be back again with your own boys. We send best regards. Yours,

"CORPORAL JENKS."

Jack read all this with interest and a complete understanding. He handed the message back to May.

"I have been already apprised of this," he said.

The young lieutenant was astonished.

"You have!" he exclaimed. "I must say that is a surprise to me. How did you hear of it?"

"From a very reliable source," said Jack. "But I did not know the real purpose of the conspiracy. I assumed that it was to be an attempt to surprise our camp."

"You may be sure that is not so," said Harold May. "It is simply a game to get Miss St. Clair by Lamont and Howe."

"I thank you, however, for bringing this matter to my attention," said Jack. "It puts me wholly on my guard. I think you need have no further fear, Miss St. Clair."

An expression of relief appeared on Sybil's face.

"I would rather die than to go back to my uncle," she said.

"I shall give my life to prevent it," declared May.

"That will not be necessary," said Jack. "I am sure that we can frustrate the game, unless the enemy overwhelm us and you pass into other hands."

"You need have no fear on that score," said Lieutenant May. "If you were forced to surrender to General Van Dorn, my influence is such that I could assure the safety of Miss St. Clair and her safe transportation to friends in the North, where the machinations of her rascally uncle could not reach her."

"We do not anticipate such an exigency," said Jack with a smile.

"You are making a brave defense," said May. "While I am a Southern officer and naturally hope for my freedom, yet I will say candidly that I hope you will not be vanquished, for I always like to see the weaker side win."

"That is very generous and kind of you," said Jack.

"Yet, I fear you are so greatly outnumbered that it may, in the interest of humanity be best for you to succumb."

"Not until the last ditch has been passed," said Jack.

"We shall hold the trenches to the end."

"I wish you good fortune."

"Thank you! As for you, Miss St. Clair, have no further fear of your uncle. I shall hope to block his game."

With this Jack left them. This time he climbed the ridge to see that the new trenches were being properly constructed.

He had a feeling that the next attack would be made at this point. It was necessary to have it well fortified.

After some time spent here he strolled over to Spencer's quarters. He had some curiosity to observe Carr, the assumed traitor.

He said nothing to Spencer about the fact that Carr was the suspected man. The bugler was busy with the routine work of the camp, and Jack had plenty of opportunity to observe him.

Carr was a short, wiry man, of the type peculiar to the Southwest. He would have been selected as an adept at the duties of a scout for his manner was keen and shrewd.

The more Jack watched him the more convinced he became that he was a man of underhand methods. He felt sure that he was capable of traitorous work.

The day passed rapidly.

There was no disposition on the part of the foe to attack. For some reason they seemed content to remain idle.

Jack could not rid himself of the conviction that the plot of Carr concerned the abduction of Sybil alone.

He was convinced that there was a deeper motive. He felt sure that it was the purpose of the foe to attempt a midnight surprise.

But, if it was the former motive alone, he decided upon a counter-plot which he believed would reverse matters to the chagrin of the plotters.

When evening came he looked for the return of Opeechuck.

He was not disappointed.

The guard of post number six brought him into camp, and with the Indian came a great surprise. Over his broad and powerful back was a heavy sack which contained many pounds of salt pork and hard-tack.

This he had procured by stealth from the wagons of the

enemy. It was a piece of work which brought cheers from the lips of the Blues.

How the Indian had done it was a mystery. It was known that he had spent the day securing the provisions which were sufficient to feed a company for at least one full meal.

It had necessitated many stealthy trips through the wagon line of the foe, and at any moment the Natchez might have been seen and shot.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Indian came in for much praise, which seemed to gratify him much.

When he had disposed of his spoils he disappeared. This was before Jack could get a chance to speak to him and the boy-captain was much disappointed.

Hal now entered Jack's tent and said:

"I have taken the precaution to post extra guards along the line of numbers four and eight," he said.

Jack started up and said:

"Hal, I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"If this traitorous work of Carr is to be carried out, we assume that it will be done through post number four."

"Yes."

"Suppose you and I take that post to-night."

"What!" exclaimed Hal in surprise. Then the plan of the young captain became plain to him and he said:

"That is a clever trick. We will do it."

"Of course there must not be the least suspicion that such is our purpose. Let the regular guard be called and relief made as usual."

"All right. It is a go. But in case of a sudden rush, ought we not to have the men ready?"

Jack was silent. This was a problem. He did not want to issue an order that would excite the suspicion of Carr, for the traitor would surely smell a rat and the game would be up.

So he said:

"There is only one way to fix that."

"Oh! What is it?"

"Carr is not one of our men. He belongs to Spencer's regiment. Now our boys are to be trusted. We can pass word through our company secretly for all to be ready to turn out on the instant alarm. They can be in instant readiness. They will be strong enough to hold until Spencer's men can turn out."

"You are right. That is our best plan."

"I think so."

So it was decided. Hal called Corporal Peters and the first sergeant of the company. They were given careful instructions.

There was nothing to do now but wait.

The first guard relief came at ten o'clock. It was one of the Blues who chanced to have post number four, which was in favor of the Blues.

It chanced also that Peters was corporal of the guard. All this happened to Jack's deep satisfaction.

The young captain was not a little disappointed at the

absence of Opeechuck. He wanted much to see the Indian and seek his advice.

But the Natchez was not in the vicinity. The hours passed slowly. Just before midnight Jack and Hal walked silently over the ridge and approached the picket of post number four.

At once the picket gave them a suspicious glance, but Jack said in a low tone:

"Norton, give me your gun."

The picket looked astonished.

"What is that, Captain Clark?" he asked.

"Give me your gun."

The sentry, in surprise, yielded up his musket. He stood at attention.

"Now tell me," Jack proceeded. "Did anybody pass out of the lines here within an hour or two, or since you have been on guard?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sentry.

"Who?" The answer was awaited with interest.

CHAPTER XII.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

"It was a fellow named Carr, one of the men in Spencer's camp," replied Norton. "He had the password, and said he was out on a reconnoitering trip for his captain."

"Very good," said Jack quietly. "You may go back up the ridge a little ways, Norton. I will hold your post for a little while. When I whistle you may come."

"Yes, sir."

The sentry, somewhat surprised, but too well disciplined to ask questions, proceeded to obey.

Jack took his gun and walked up and down the beat. He kept a sharp gaze out into the gloom.

Hal remained in the shadows back of him.

It was a perilous position for Jack Clark. At any moment he knew that a shot from the gloom might terminate his life.

At twelve o'clock came the distant hail of the sentries, beginning with post number one and being passed along the line.

"Post number three! Twelve o'clock and all's well!"

Jack shifted his musket and repeated the call.

"Post number four! Twelve o'clock and all's well!"

The call went on into the distance with methodical rhythm. Then Jack came to a stand with bayonet down.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend!" came from the gloom.

"Advance friend, and give the countersign."

Jack saw a dark figure in the gloom approach him. Then a voice said:

"Lincoln is our friend."

Jack shouldered his musket.

"Pass in, friend," he said.

The man advanced and crossed the line. He halted and said:

"It's a warm night, picket."

"Not for me," replied Jack. "I am as cool as ice."

"Humph! how'd you like something to warm you then?"

"What have you got?"

"Some good old Kentucky bourbon."

"I never drink whiskey."

"You don't know what is good for you."

"I think I do. At least I believe I am the best judge."

Carr, for he it was, gave a little discordant laugh. Jack noted that his hand was upon his hip. He was on the alert.

"Pretty stiff, aren't ye?" said the traitor, as he took a step nearer. "You are one of Clark's men. You fellows feel pretty high-toned, don't you?"

"I don't know," said Jack in a steely voice. "We have proper self-respect and also a contempt for traitors."

Carr started as if shot. For a moment he seemed to wither under this reply. Terror, blended with stupefied astonishment, had possession of him.

"Eh?" he gritted finally. "What do ye mean by that?"

"Just what I say, Preston Carr," said Jack coldly. "What is your business outside the lines every night?"

"I am reconnoitering for my captain."

"That is a lie, and you know it. You are a traitor!"

Jack lowered his bayonet and at the same moment whistled. Carr's hand went up from his hip and a pistol gleamed. In the same instant a cat-call issued from his lips.

It was answered from the gloom. Dark figures swarmed in the vicinity.

Jack, with a light sweep of his bayonet, dashed Carr's arm aside and the pistol exploded harmlessly. In an instant there was a lively fracas.

From the gloom dark figures were rushing down upon the sentry. The game had been for Carr to take him off his guard and kill him.

But a terrific blow from Jack's musket had laid Carr senseless on the ground. He leaped back, allowing the invaders to pursue him up the ridge.

Bullets whistled about him. Jack had no need to give alarm.

Hal had called for the Blues and they now swept down upon the flank of the invading party. They fired a volley and then dashed in with the bayonet.

But the fight was over instantly. The conspirators threw up their arms and surrendered. A score of them threw down their weapons.

As many more lay dead and wounded on the ground. Spencer's men were now turning out and the ridge was lined with defenders.

The game had failed.

Carr, under guard, was marched into the light of the camp-fires. The other prisoners were with him.

And now a startling discovery was made. Among them Jack saw Osborn Howe, the planter, and his protege, Lamont.

Disgust and rage and chagrin showed in their faces. Their game had failed and they had been trapped.

The young captain gave orders to have the prisoners

strongly guarded. Meanwhile a heavy guard was posted along the ridge.

But the second attack did not materialize. That it had been planned Jack felt absolutely certain.

For, when all was over, a lithe figure glided to the door of his tent. It was Opeechuck, the Natchez. He waited silently for Jack to come out.

"Opeechuck!" cried the young captain with delight. "We owe all this to you. But for your warning we might have been prisoners ourselves now."

The Indian was pleased. But his face never relaxed its stoical calmness.

"Opeechuck have news," he said. "Me tell you news."

"Oh!" said Jack. "What is it?"

The Natchez pointed to the east.

"Mebbe to-morrow soldier in blue come and fight soldier in gray. Mebbe you escape then."

Jack grasped the Indian's meaning in an instant.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that reinforcements are coming?"

This was plainly the Indian's meaning. Jack knew that it could only mean that General Grant or Sherman was already moving down in Van Dorn's rear.

What this meant to the besieged Union soldiers can hardly be told in words. Their boy-captain was elated.

Certainly he had good reason to feel overjoyed. They had held the trenches in spite of being surrounded by an overpowering foe.

He knew that he had well fulfilled Grant's object. He had held Van Dorn and Forrest, thus giving Sherman time to cut the latter's line of march.

Opeechuck refused reward and Jack could do nothing but thank him. The young captain at once went to Colonel Spencer with the good news.

Spencer was overwhelmed with joy.

"I knew Grant would not leave us here to our fate," he said. "We have done our duty."

"I believe so. But there is yet much for us to do."

"That is true."

"We foiled the attempt to attack us by surprise, didn't we?"

"We did. It gives me a chill of horror though to know that we have a traitor in our regiment. I shall deal with him severely."

Carr, an object of most pitiable fear, was crouching on the ground nearby, with a heavy guard about him. At sunrise he would expiate his crime.

Just then Jack saw Osborn Howe. He could not resist approaching the planter.

"Well, friend Howe," he said coolly, "you have made a bad mess of your affairs, haven't you? It would have been wiser for you to have remained quietly at home on your plantation and let your pretty niece shape her own career."

"She is an ingrate!" gritted the planter. "See all I have done for her! Now she casts me aside!"

"I think she showed good sense."

"What right have you to meddle in other people's affairs?"

"To the contrary, you attempted to meddle in other people's affairs. As a result you got the worst of it. You cannot deny that."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"I haven't decided whether to hang you or shoot you."

Howe's face grew pale.

"You Yankee sneak," he gritted, "you have no right to hold us under guard. We are non-combatants."

"Oh!" said Jack with sarcasm. "Is that so, indeed! What did you mean then by attempting to force our guard and enter our camp last night?"

"I had a right to come here and take my niece away."

"Indeed! that gave you the right to kill our sentries, invade our camp with Van Dorn's army at your back, did it? Everyone of you had muskets. It hardly looks like the work of non-combatants."

"I am a planter and not a soldier," said Howe. "You can hold Lamont, but you can't hold me."

At this exhibition of cowardly treachery, Lamont's eyes blazed.

"You consummate old scoundrel!" he cried. "You think to gain your own safety by sacrificing mine. But for you I would not be here now."

"But for me you'd been hung years ago," snapped Howe.

"You know what your game was. You wanted your niece's inheritance and you expected to get it through me. I am making a clean breast of it. I may be a villain, but I'm not a coward like you."

A hiss of hatred escaped Howe.

"You're a simple fool!" he gritted.

"Am I? perhaps so! But I'm in this scrape and I'm going to meet my punishment like a man."

"Well," said Jack coolly, "you certainly are a precious pair of rogues. You ought to both hang from the same tree."

"Don't, I beg of you!" protested Lamont. "Whatever you do with me, don't consign me to such a fate. Let me hang alone!"

Howe made no reply. His sullen temper had spent itself. He lapsed into a moody indifference.

Filled with disgust, Jack walked away. He met May and Sybil. The young girl was very pale.

"Captain Clark," she said in a husky voice, "may I speak with you?"

Jack doffed his cap.

"I am much honored," he said. "In what way can I serve you?"

"You have my uncle as prisoner."

"Yes."

"What will you do with him?"

"I have not yet reached a decision."

"I—I know he has done very wrong. I don't doubt but that he should meet with severe punishment. Will—he be shot?"

"That is yet to be decided," replied Jack. "His case will have to be considered."

"Oh, Captain Clark!" she burst forth. "He is my uncle. He has deeply wronged me, indeed, he has been my foe. But—would it be possible to let him go? If he would only promise never to conspire against the Government of the United States again? If he would promise to leave the country?"

CHAPTER XIII.

EXIT OF THE VILLAINS.

Jack Clark looked into the face of the young girl before him and a curious wave of sentiment passed over him.

It had been to him a matter of doubt as to how to dispose justly of the case of Osborn Howe.

He did not want the planter's life. It filled him with repugnance to think of such a thing.

On the other hand he had feared to set him free lest he might prove again a powerful menace to the safety and life-happiness of the young girl.

Howe's connection with the traitor, Carr, was perhaps sufficient cause for a trial and conviction as a conspirator. But what could the life of such a wretch avail the country at this moment?

So the young captain spent some moments in deep reflection.

"Miss St. Clair," he said, "your request is quite unusual and unexpected. Your uncle has been your sworn enemy. I learn that his real purpose in desiring your marriage with Lamont was that he might get hold of your inheritance so that those two villains could divide it."

An expression of disgust and loathing appeared in the young girl's face.

"That is all the better reason why I do not wish to see my uncle hanged," she said. "He has wronged me, but I would rather he should get his punishment at the hands of a just God."

Jack bowed and said:

"Your sentiments are correct. Let us go over and discuss the matter with him."

For a moment the young girl shrank back. But Harold May said:

"Have no fear. I will protect you."

When they approached Howe, the planter glared at them in a wolfish way. Jack was the first to speak:

"Osborn Howe," he said, "I have brought your niece to see you."

"Well, you could have spared yourself the trouble," gritted the planter. "I have no more interest in her."

"I have no doubt she is pleased to make sure of that," said Harold May.

Howe turned upon him like a tiger.

"You are the cause of all this trouble, you milk-faced puppy!" he hissed. "I'll square it with you if I live."

"You can never do it," said May contemptuously. "Fear of you is a thing of the past. You are a subject for the hangman."

Howe's face grew ashy pale.

"Hang me if you will," he snapped. "My blood will be on your heads."

"No, uncle," said Sybil in a quiet tone. "You look at the matter in a wrong light. You have played your game and lost. You wanted me to marry Luke Lamont. It is certain that I never shall. Why not give up the game?"

Howe looked at the young girl in a furtive, crafty way. It was plain that her pacific words had touched no responsive chord in his being.

"I think you are right," he said with a cunning leer. "I have lost the game. That Lamont is a soft-headed fool. He depended on me and would not give me aid. I am quits with him. I don't care what becomes of you. Go to the dogs with your lover."

"Do you mean that, uncle?" cried the young girl eagerly. "You will give it up and molest me no further?"

"I never want to see your face again," snapped the planter.

"That is enough," said Jack. "If you will agree never again to attempt interference with your niece or her happiness I will give you your worthless life. You shall go free."

Howe gasped and drew himself up. The pallor vanished from his face, being supplanted by an apoplectic purple.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Yes. I could order you shot at sunrise, along with Carr. But in deference to Miss St. Clair and to avoid useless taking of life I will make the bargain with you."

"I accept," said the planter. "But this don't include Lamont."

At this Lamont turned and gave his late partner a malevolent glance. But Jack turned to the guard and said:

"Hold these men until daybreak. Then march them out of our lines to the music of fife and drum."

The guard saluted.

"Your order shall be obeyed," he said.

"Aha!" cried Howe jeeringly. "How do you like that, Lamont? Drummed out of camp?"

"I can stand it as well as you," retorted Lamont.

Jack now retired to his tent for some much needed rest. The incidents of the night had been thrilling enough.

But he was early astir. It was just daybreak when he emerged from his tent and walked through the camp.

Many of the Blues were astir preparing their breakfast. In front of Spencer's command stood a file of men. Jack could not help a little shiver.

He knew what it meant.

In a moment from a tent emerged two guards with a hatless, blind-folded wretch between them. It was Carr, the traitor.

He was going to a richly deserved fate. He was led to the outer edge of the camp. Here he was placed at the foot of a trench dug in the ground and which was to be his grave.

Jack watched the execution from a distance. He saw the sergeant of the guard with his sword as he gave the order to the file of men.

The line of muskets were aimed at the heart of the doomed man.

There was a crash, the spy shivered, reeled and fell into the trench. In a few moments the clods of earth were being heaped upon him forever.

So ended the career of Preston Carr, the traitor. Jack turned away sick at heart.

He was brave and his spirit never quailed. But there were many things in this game of war which sickened him. Just then, as the sun burst out of the eastern horizon, the music of fife and drum was heard.

Through the encampment came a corporal's guard, preceded by the musicians. Between the guard marched two crestfallen men.

They looked neither to right nor left, nor minded the jeers and jests flung at them by the soldiers who lined the way.

"Good-bye, old chap."

"Straighten up there! Hay-foot! Straw-foot! Straighten up there!"

"Eyes right! Mind that goose step!"

The two prisoners, however, heeded not the sarcastic flings. They were soon beyond the lines and it is needless to say cut for safety as quickly as possible. That was the last of Osborn Howe and his confrere, Luke Lamont.

It happened later, when Sherman marched that way, that the Howe plantation was raided and burned. The hard-fisted old planter fled to New Orleans, where he disappeared utterly.

When the two prisoners had been drummed out of camp and the Blues had finished their frugal morning meal, a startling sound burst upon the hearing of all.

It was a distant, sullen boom, followed by another and another.

In an instant Jack Clark sprung out of his tent. He was met by Spencer.

"Do you hear that?" asked the colonel.

"It is distant firing."

"Yes."

"It means but one thing. I believe Sherman is coming up to get Van Dorn in the rear."

"In that case," said Spencer, "we are relieved. Danger is past."

"I hope so. It, of course, depends on whether Sherman can drive Van Dorn or not."

"We need hardly fear that. Sherman has a much larger force. Van Dorn will surely retreat."

"I hope so."

Jack and the colonel climbed to the summit of the ridge. The sounds of rapid musketry fire came from the distance. It was the preliminary fire of the skirmish line.

Then the two officers saw that lines of gray were rapidly filing away over the distant ridges.

Van Dorn was facing his force about to meet this rear attack. It was every moment growing more lively.

Jack was extremely nervous. He paced up and down excitedly.

"If it was not for Forrest we'd move out and attack also," he said.

"It would not be advisable," said Spencer. "You see we

lose our intrenchments. Moreover, Van Dorn could turn and swamp us."

Nothing could be seen of the distant battle save a great pall of white smoke which now rose over the ridges. Jack was unable to restrain himself longer.

He turned to Corporal Peters and said:

"Get me my horse, Tom. I am going to ride over to that next ridge."

"I advise you not to do it, captain," said Spencer, fearfully. "It would be easy to run into an ambush."

"I believe the foe have all they can attend to in front, just now," said Jack. "I shall risk it."

The horse was brought and Jack galloped away. In a few moments he had gained the distant ridge.

It was higher than the one he had left. It afforded him a much wider view of the country.

The scene which Jack beheld was a thrilling one.

He saw on the distant level plain troops of cavalry galloping to the charge, men in blue and gray. Batteries belching fire and smoke. Long lines of blue charging across the level plain.

The Stars and Stripes were seen everywhere. He could not but believe that it was Sherman's advance guard.

The sight so thrilled him that he could not withstand it. He would return and order the Blues forward to participate in the contest.

But just as he was about to press on the rein a startling thing happened. The horse, with an almost human cry, staggered and sank in a heap under him.

A bullet had penetrated its side.

Jack sprung up and looked around him in a startled way. Then he saw the cause of his trouble.

Up the ridge came several men in gray. They waved their muskets and shouted:

"Surrender, stranger! Surrender, or we 'uns will shoot!"

Jack saw that he was in a desperate position. But he had no idea of such a thing as surrender.

He cast one swift glance about him. He had no other weapons than his pistol and his sword.

He drew both. Then a bullet clipped the rim of his cap. Another tore his coat sleeve.

The two Confederates who had fired paused to reload. The other two had their guns levelled.

It hardly seemed likely that they would miss.

"Surrender!" was the fierce cry.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FINAL BATTLE.

But Jack Clark preferred death to surrender. He acted with sudden impulse.

Quick as a flash he aimed at the first Confederate with his pistol and fired. The ball went true to its mark.

The Confederate's musket exploded, but the ball went wide. He reeled and clutched at his throat and fell. Jack's shot had told.

The fourth Confederate pulled fiercely at his trigger.

But for some reason it would not respond. He was now within a few yards of Jack.

"Surrender!" he yelled. But the words were his last. From a clump of bushes in his rear sprang a lithe snake-like figure.

With incredible quickness it was upon the Confederate soldier. A tomahawk swung in the air and the soldier in gray went down with a broken skull.

Opeechuck, crafty and alert with the fire of battle in his eyes, crouched before Jack.

"White chief run quick," said the Indian in a guttural voice. "Gray soldier come heap quick. Over there."

He jerked his thumb over the southern corner of the ridge where heavy bushes grew. Jack knew what it meant.

"Look out, Opeechuck!" he cried. "Those chaps are loading! They'll make a mark of you!"

But the Indian had his eye on the two Confederates below. He measured the distance and with a tremendous sweep of his right arm sent his tomahawk flying down there.

It fled like a bullet through the air. The fated soldier did not see it coming and it struck him full in the face.

The keen blade cleft through bone and flesh and sent the blinded man to the ground, where he rolled and grovelled in agony.

The other did not pause to finish reloading his gun, but broke and ran for his life. Opeechuck now began to gesticulate wildly and exhort the boy-captain to flee.

Jack, however, needed no urging. He cast a look of regret at his horse and then turned and ran down the slope.

He had hardly reached the base of the ridge when Confederates appeared behind him on the summit.

They sent a shot after him, but Jack and Opeechuck had now got out of range. Hal and a squad of the Blues had already started to their aid.

When Jack reached the line he met Spencer, who wrung his hand.

"That was a daring thing you did, captain," he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't get back."

"Well, it was a close call," admitted Jack. "But I did it."

"Did you see anything?"

"Did I?" cried the boy-captain. "I saw the whole battlefield. They are having it hot and heavy over there. Van Dorn's cavalry was making a charge."

"The deuce! Is it Sherman's corps?"

"I don't know. It is a large force of Union troops. I believe we ought to move out and join in the fight."

"Do you think it safe?" asked Spencer.

"Whether it is or not, we ought to be in it and do our part. It seems very chicken-hearted to remain here."

The Union colonel winced.

"I was looking at the matter from the standpoint of caution," he said. "We are a small force. In the trenches we can hold out a long time. But in the open field weight of numbers prevails."

"You are right there, Colonel Spencer," said Jack. "Yet,

I believe we can do something to assist our would-be rescuers."

"You are my ranking officer by General Grant's order. I am ready to execute your bidding."

"Then I order an advance," cried Jack. "We must not remain here."

Colonel Spencer turned and gave the order. In an instant the men turned out in perfect order with camp equipment packed and all ready for advance.

The guns were dragged to the summit of the ridge.

But, just at this moment and as they were about to advance along what was believed to be the rear of the enemy's right flank, a startling thing happened.

A great shout went up from their rear. The cry welled from hundreds of throats.

"Forrest! Forrest is coming!"

Over the camp-ground below came a column of Forrest's brown-clad riders. Their sabres flashed in air and they came on at the charge.

Spencer's face was white.

"You see, Captain Clark," he said. "What I feared has happened. Forrest was only waiting for this chance."

"Form square!" shouted Jack. "Wagons in the centre. Train your battery on them. Ready all! Fall in!"

The orders ran rapidly along the line and were as instantly obeyed. The Blues fell into the form of a square on the instant and the guns were as quickly trained.

Forrest's charge had been quickly conceived and seemed to be as quickly executed. For a moment it seemed as if the Blues would be swept away.

But suddenly the battery began to fire. The grape-shot ploughed into the mass of horsemen and they fell in heaps.

Then the musketry fire also cut into their line and so hot was it that they staggered and seemed about to recoil. But they came on again and the most critical moment had arrived.

The horses were urged up the ascent and the front line of the cavalry struck the bayonets of the infantry square. Then ensued a scene of carnage.

Horses and men were piled up in a heap. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting with sword and bayonet followed.

But the square was not penetrated. It held, and now once again the shotted guns burst forth.

The cavalry was hurled back in mad confusion. A wall of dead horses and men had formed.

The rear ranks would or could not advance over this obstacle, so the bugle was heard sounding the recall. Back went the troop.

The Blues rent the air with their exultant cheers. It was certainly a great victory and one to be proud of.

For a time it seemed as if Forrest meant to make another charge. Twice his line formed and advanced.

The Blues' battery though made life almost impossible on the hillside. Very wisely Forrest refused to sacrifice any more men.

He drew back, and for a time there was a lull. Some of his men kept up a desultory musketry fire with the Blues.

"Hurrah! Who says we can't fight out of the trenches

as well as in them?" cried the fat, little corporal, Peters. "We gave them all they wanted."

Spencer was filled with grim delight.

"We held them grandly, Clark," he said. "But I must say we had advantage of position. If we had been on a level plain they might have carried us."

"Not so," replied Jack. "On level ground we would have had a better range with the guns. More than that our square would have held them."

But it was now in order to move on, if Jack's plan to join in the distant attack on Van Dorn was to be carried out.

So the Blues moved on down the slope and to the next ridge. The wagon-train was in the centre and guarded carefully by two lines of troops.

The guns brought up the rear. They were shotted and ready for instant use.

In fact everything was ready in case of an attack for an instant system of defense. A square would be formed in a few moments.

Forrest, however, did not advance again to the charge. He hovered safely in the rear.

Once Jack unlimbered the guns quickly and sent a storm of shot after him. But he kept at a safe distance.

Gradually the Blues crossed the next ridge and now the scene of battle came plainly to view. It was seen to be a desperate contest.

The Blues' sudden appearance on the flank of Van Dorn's position, being unexpected, had a tremendous effect. The Confederates, thinking it heavy reinforcements, began to fall back.

With this the next thing to be seen was the rapid advance of the Union left. Signals were exchanged and the result was the position of the Blues was merged with that of the other Union force.

An orderly rode up the slope and at once saluted Jack Clark.

"What regiment is this?" he asked.

"Spencer's regiment and the Fairdale Blues," was the reply.

"Who is in command?"

"Captain Jack Clark." At this Jack came forward. The orderly saluted and said:

"I bring the compliments of General Ord, who has been sent here by General Grant to reinforce you against Van Dorn."

"I will go with you to see General Ord," said Jack. "Will you wait till I can mount?"

"Certainly, captain!"

A horse was brought and Jack mounted at once. He was quickly on his way now to see General Ord.

Jack was in high spirits. He knew that Ord would have a strong enough force to hold Van Dorn. The plans of General Grant would be successful.

And their success could alone be attributed to the skillful work of the Blues and their colleagues, Spencer's men, in holding Van Dorn.

Jack and the orderly rode away at full speed. They

passed lines of men straggling to the rear, who had been under fire and were exhausted and wounded.

Hospital attendants were carrying men from the field and white-capped nurses were at their work. It was a typical battlefield scene.

General Ord, mounted on a white horse and surrounded by his staff, was riding along the line when Jack approached. At sight of the young captain the General drew rein.

His face brightened and he cried:

"Hello! Is that you, Captain Clark?"

"I am glad to see you, General Ord," cried Jack. "You arrived in good season to save us."

"I am glad to know that. Then your command is safe?"

"It is."

"And the regiment Sherman sent you under Colonel Spencer?"

"They are with us out yonder at the left of the line. We were lucky to get out of the scrape, for we were completely surrounded by the foe."

"Forrest on one side and Van Dorn on the other, eh?"

"Yes."

"How did you hold them with such a handful of men?"

"By lively work in the trenches."

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH ENDS THE STORY.

General Ord smiled.

"You must be a good engineer, or else you selected an impregnable position," he said. "Even an intrenched regiment cannot resist too heavy an assault."

"We succeeded in getting a good position," said Jack. "But I must give our boys credit for brave work. We also have a few prisoners."

"Well," said General Ord, "you are in line for promotion when you see General Grant. You have done great work, my boy, and he will appreciate it."

"I have simply done my duty," said Jack. "I could do nothing more. Where is General Grant?"

"He is on his way to Memphis, I believe. There is to be a concentration of our armies on the Yazoo. Sherman is already on his way to Vicksburg."

Jack in his enthusiasm swung his cap and cheered.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Nothing could be better! We are sure to beat the Confederates!"

"Victory is sure to side with the North," said General Ord. "They are not winning many successes in Virginia now, though."

"McClellan does seem to have hard luck."

"Yes. I believe he has been superseded."

Jack was somewhat shocked by this bit of news.

"Too bad!" he said. "McClellan is a great general, but I am afraid he is overruled by others. The Army of the Potomac is one of the finest in the world."

"It ought to be," said General Ord. "If we had their equipments I think we could sweep the country. We men of the West haven't much style, but we can fight."

"Perhaps they'll call us over into Virginia to fight Lee after we get through here."

"If they do, we'll have to whip them."

"You're right, we will!"

General Ord now swept the field with his glass. He chuckled with satisfaction:

"Van Dorn is beaten," he cried. "He is already on the run. Hurrah, for the Union!"

The cry was taken up by a line of men marching by.

It was true that Van Dorn was in wild retreat.

His men could not stand the heavy fire of the Union batteries. Twice they had charged and once captured six guns. But they had been as quickly retaken.

Jack saw that the struggle was decided. Tiring of the scene of carnage he saluted General Ord and said:

"I will go back to my company now, general, unless you have further orders for me."

"None at all, my boy," replied the general. "Report to me later. We shall not pursue Van Dorn. I intend to march from here to Grenada and join Sherman."

Jack rode back to his comrades. They were awaiting him eagerly.

They listened with interest to his report. When it was announced that Van Dorn was beaten and that Sherman was on his way to Vicksburg, they cheered.

"We shall join Sherman, and perhaps our next fighting may be at Vicksburg," said Jack. "In any event we are always ready for duty."

Colonel Spencer now proposed that they bivouac on the field. Van Dorn was in wild retreat to the westward. The battle was over for the day.

There was a small engagement between Forrest and the Union cavalry out on the far left of the line. But the wily Confederate raiders had finally retired.

Night fell upon the battlefield and a mild rain began to fall. The Blues, however, had their baggage train with them and had the comfort of shelter tents.

All through the night the usual scenes of a battlefield were enacted. The wails and cries of the wounded and the dying filled the air and mingled with the dreams of the soldiers.

Jack Clark was unable to sleep much. He went about ministering to the comfort of his boys as much as possible.

At length the dreary night wore away and daylight came at last. It was a relief to many.

The Blues responded to roll-call in fairly good condition. But Jack saw that a rest was the needful thing.

Rain fell in torrents, but in spite of this General Ord's command was to get under way.

The dead were buried on the field. The wounded were placed in ambulances or left behind in a field hospital, to follow later.

The great baggage trains rolled away to the southward. The lines of blue-clad soldiers followed, plodding through the rain and mud.

The Blues were hardly in a cheerful frame of mind as they fell in and went plodding away, soaked to the skin.

The autumn winds were beginning to blow and there

was a chill in the air. But a soldier's life is not one of downy ease—at least not always.

Jack and Hal rode at the head of the company and between them rode Sybil St. Clair.

She had parted from Harold May who, with other captured officers, had been sent to Paducah there to await exchange.

Sybil was to proceed with the Blues to the nearest railway station where she could get a train for the North.

"Captain Clark," she said as they rode on, "I feel that I owe all my happiness to you. It is much more than I can ever repay."

"I trust you will feel no obligation for that which has been to me so great a pleasure," said Jack.

"You are very gallant. It is true that the South cannot boast of all the chivalry of the country."

"I think you are right, Miss St. Clair," said Jack.

"There are gallant men on both sides. It is a pity they cannot be pitted against a common foe."

"I agree with you, captain," replied the young girl.

"But I think they will tire of this fighting after a while and then we shall have peace."

"Let us pray for it."

Just then they topped a rise of ground and were able to look across the country. Jack gave a great start.

From a growth of forest he saw a lithe figure emerge. One moment against the foliage he saw and recognized that figure. "Look!" he cried. "It is the Indian!"

It was indeed, Opeechuck, the Natchez. He was watching the Union troops with one hand shading his eyes. He seemed to recognize the Blues, for he held his arms above his head a moment. Jack shouted to him, but the Natchez did not respond.

He turned and plunged into the woods. Jack never saw him again. But he did not forget the loyal red man who saved his life and proved the means of his winning one of the greatest successes of his life.

At a railroad station Sybil took her leave of the Blues. Jack and Hal wished her happiness and the Blues cheered her. Then they marched on.

Colonel Spencer had joined Ord's rear guard, so that the Blues were no longer in his company. But Jack met the colonel many times later in the course of the war.

They were now hoping to join Sherman in his advance of Vicksburg. How they succeeded we will narrate in another story.

THE END.

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